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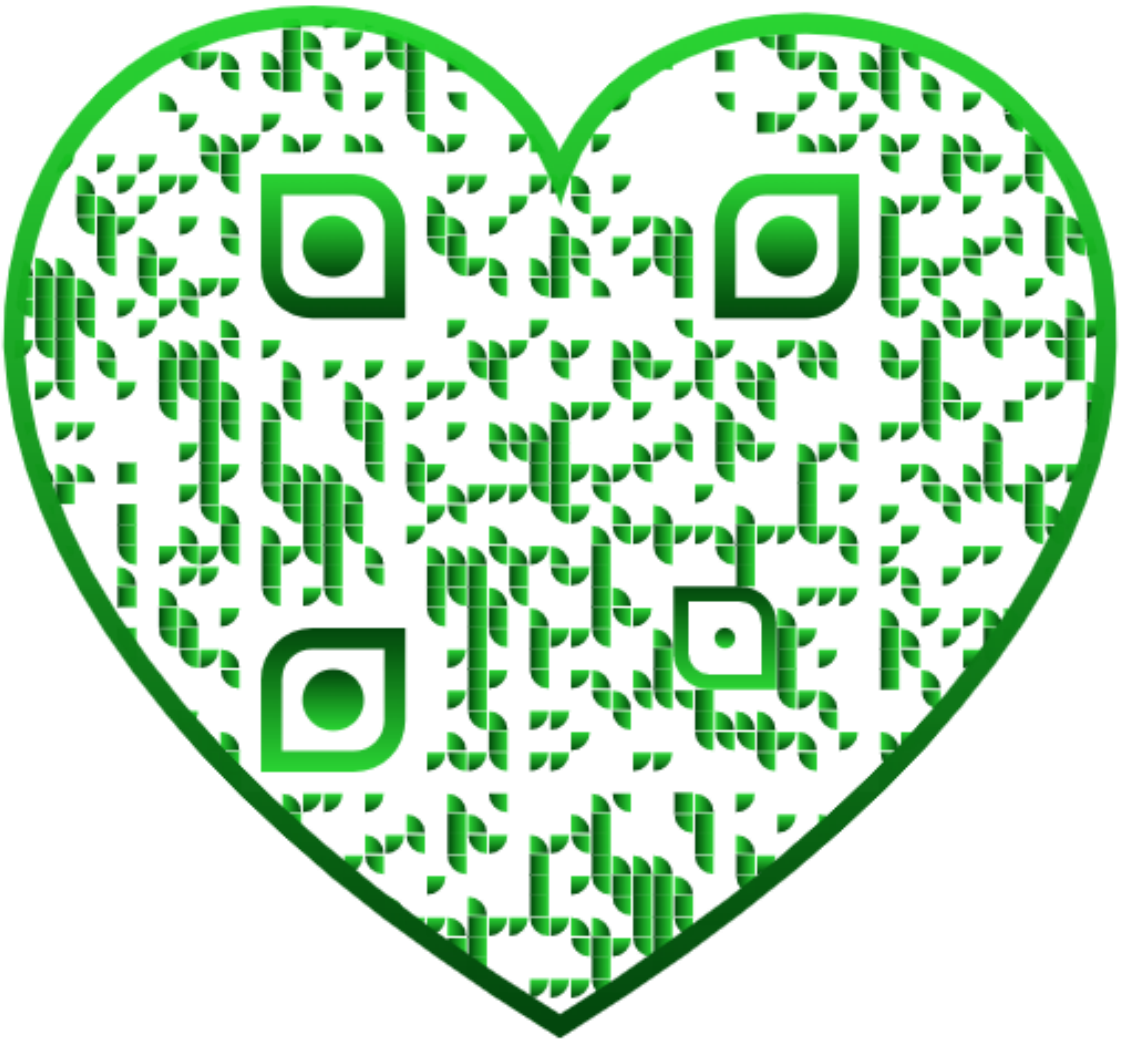

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ESPECIALLY SINCE I joined the *Relix* team 15 years ago, I've had all sorts of reasons for skipping the occasional family function or personal obligation for *another* weekend of live music—many times work, sometimes pleasure, often that blurry space in between. But up until two years ago, my concert history had one glaring omission: I'd never been to a tried-and-true country-music festival. So when our friends at Founders Entertainment decided to throw FarmBorough on New York's Randall's Island—just a bus or boat ride away from my apartment—I jumped at the opportunity to spend a weekend taking in acts like Dierks Bentley, Luke Bryan and Brad Paisley.

I'm usually a little OCD when it comes to mapping out my festival schedule—charting my tour around the festival site much like my wife would scour Yelp before a trip—so it was kind of fun to approach the weekend as a novice, wandering blindly between stages until something stuck. (I'm ashamed to admit my knowledge of pure country music ends sometime in the '70s.)

Sometimes the small-font bands grow up to be headliners

It was also that much more rewarding when I stumbled on a then relatively unknown Nashville artist named Chris Stapleton playing in front of a red, white and blue bunting on FarmBorough's side stage. At first, I wasn't even sure who I was hearing, but it felt immediately familiar—owing just enough to Poco and the Allman Brothers to feel accessible to my rock-and-roll-trained ears, but also just Nashville enough to be classified as authentic modern country. I was hooked and gave up my big exploration plans to catch the rest of his set.

As luck and some well-timed booking would have it, I was also able to check Stapleton out a second and a third time at Forecastle and Bonnaroo during the next year, each setting exposing a little more of his DNA—after all, the outlaw musician we got to know on *Traveller* has almost as much in common with jam-rock and American-roots music as he does with honky-tonk and country-pop.

As it turns out, we'd not only already written about Chris Stapleton a few years earlier on our newswire when he opened for the Brothers and Skynyrd as a solo act, but I had also actually already seen him when his old bluegrass band The SteelDrivers rolled into Bonnaroo for their inaugural trip to The Farm in 2009. (If only meta-tags were around when I started keeping the concert log that's functioned as something of my diary since high school.) And, soon after that lucky encounter, Stapleton skyrocketed from a well-kept festival secret to a viral celebrity, thanks to his show-stealing performance alongside Justin Timberlake at the 2015 CMAs.

In certain ways, he's the embodiment of what I like to call a "slow-burn viral sensation"—spending years slogging it out in sweaty or empty clubs, before one slight move catapults you to stardom. It's certainly not a new phenomenon, but in the age of social media and instant access, the effects are highlighted that much more.

It's a similar story to another longtime "*Relix* band," Portugal. The Man, who we profiled in our September issue. Much like Stapleton, they'd been trucking along for over a decade before one of their songs, "Feel It Still," finally broke through to the type of crowd that mostly consumes music in chain stores and gyms instead of at festivals and club shows. Neither artist really changed their sound—perhaps a bit of polish here, or a slight stylistic tweak there—yet a certain confluence of forces suddenly boomeranged them into the big leagues.

I've often felt that investing my time and energy discovering new and emerging bands in the trenches was akin to buying emotional stock in a band. So when they hit it big and keep it together, you get a return on the investment in the form of personal gratification or at least some well-earned bragging rights.

As the holiday season approaches and the calendar turns, here's to another year of musical stock tips and emotional investment opportunities—and hoping many more of our favorite overlooked bands will go public just as gracefully as our current cover subject.

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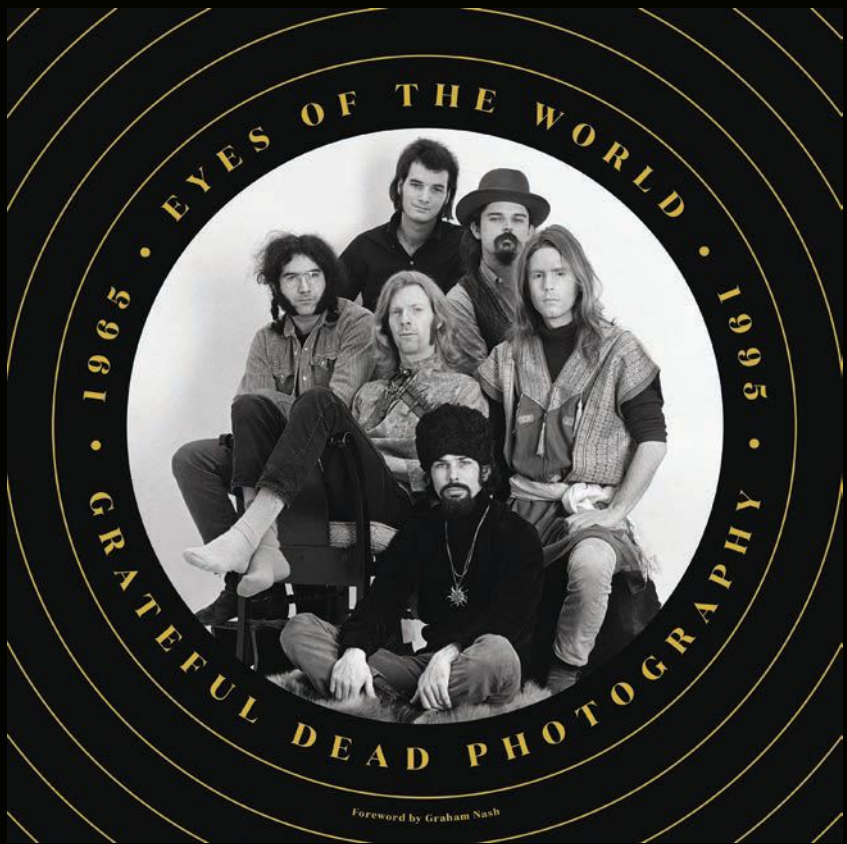
ON THE COVER

Becky Fluke shot Chris Stapleton.



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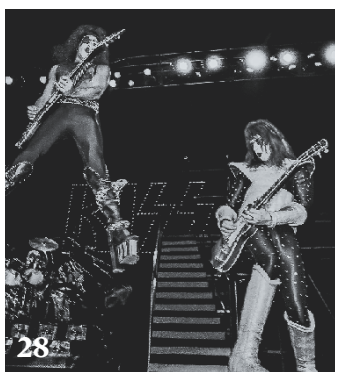
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FEATURES

53 | Songs of Myself
Earlier this year, **Chris Stapleton** released *From A Room: Volume 1*, the follow-up to 2015's *Traveller*, for which he received Album of the Year, Male Vocalist of the Year and New Artist of the Year at the CMA Awards. Yet Stapleton—who previously fronted the popular bluegrass act The SteelDrivers and rock band The Jompson Brothers—also draws on the sounds and inspirations of Ray Charles, Otis Redding, Freddie King and others. Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** speaks with Stapleton about his wide-ranging musical passions and his dynamic touring group (which includes his wife **Morgane**, a celebrated singer-songwriter in her own right) around the arrival of *From A Room: Volume 2*.

51 | Summoning *Rhonda Lee*
Nicole Atkins recently relocated from New Jersey to Nashville. It's part of a larger life transition, which included a commitment to sobriety and a sincere appreciation for her new neighbors. As **Holly Gleason** discovers, Atkins has drawn on this change in lifestyle to record the noir cocktail-jazz song cycle *Goodnight Rhonda Lee*.

48 | Mind Mischief
If your band is capable of packing Madison Square Garden for 13 nights during one summer without repeating a single song, then what do you have left to accomplish musically? For **Mike Gordon**, the answer to that seemingly difficult question is pretty straightforward: Focus on another project that allows you to take centerstage and showcase the slew of songs you've been writing in your spare time. Veteran *Pitchfork* contributor **Rob Mitchum** catches up with Gordon during a tour stop in Chicago and explores the Phish bassist's unorthodox decision to follow this summer's Baker's Dozen shows with a surprisingly indie-rock-indebted solo LP, *OGOGO*.

45 | Further on Down the Road
Almost a quarter-century ago, **Spoon** helped seed the modern hipster movement and, despite a few bumps along the way, they remain one of the strongest acts to come out of the blogger boom. In the process, **Britt Daniel**, **Jim Eno** and their bandmates have grown from local heroes to true studio innovators, even if their sonic prowess hasn't always translated into financial success. Now, as Assistant Editor **Matt Inman** explains, Spoon have come full circle, returning home to Matador after almost 20 years for *Hot Thoughts*—older, wiser and just as committed to creating authentic Austin indie-rock.

42 | The Middle-Class Golden Ticket
J. Roddy Walston and the Business used to measure their success with a simple test—would they be better off as baristas? For many years, while slogging it out on the road with his rowdy rock group, Walston questioned whether he'd pass that test but, with the release of the band's new ATO LP, *Destroyers of the Soft Life*, most of his musical dreams have finally come true. **Mike Ayers** sat down with the Business leader in Brooklyn, N.Y., and, over some octopus and watermelon salad, finds out how Walston managed to circumvent his *Almost Famous* excess moment and emerge as one of the best rising acts on the festival circuit.

40 | Pilot Season
The tale of *Relix*'s collaborative beer with String Cheese Incident keyboardist **Kyle Hollingsworth** and **SweetWater Brewery** continues. When it came time to brew the pilot batch, Hollingsworth and *Relix* Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** made their way to SweetWater headquarters in Atlanta to boil some sweet wort and get hoppy.

38 | Save the Last Dance for Me
Sharon Jones was the ultimate "Soul Survivor." The onetime wedding singer was already in her 40s when she got her big break and, until she passed away last year after a heroic battle with cancer at age 60, she gave the people what they wanted night after night. Now, her stalwart **Dap-Kings** have put the final touches on her last LP, *Soul of a Woman*. Contributing Editor **Jeff Tamarkin** takes an in-depth look at Jones' final bow.

Lynn Goldsmith (KISS)

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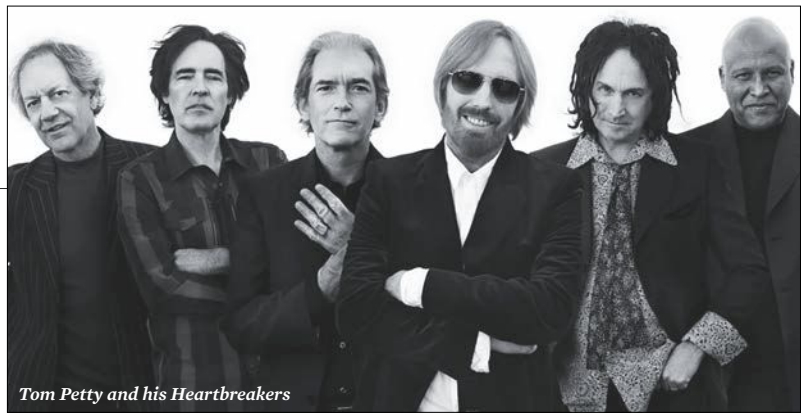

Tom Petty and his Heartbreakers

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

REMEMBERING TOM PETTY

On October 2, Tom Petty passed away at the UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica, Calif. He was 66. A day earlier, the legendary rock-and-roll singer/guitarist was found unconscious and in full cardiac arrest at his home, just days after wrapping up a massive 40th anniversary tour.

Petty left behind an iconic catalog of radio hits and thoughtful musings that touched art-rock introverts and sprawling summer amphitheater crowds alike. Though he stepped out on his own with 1989's *Full Moon Fever* and 1994's *Wildflowers*, Petty and his Heartbreakers remained remarkably intact for four decades.

Over the years, Petty famously worked with legendary artists like Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham; he was also a member of the Traveling Wilburys alongside Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Roy Orbison and Jeff Lynne.

Relix tracked Petty's career over the years and, most recently, he sat for a conversation alongside his reunited first band Mudcrutch in 2016. Petty's last *Relix* cover hit newsstands in late 2014 while he was promoting what turned out to be the Heartbreakers' final release, *Hypnotic Eye*.

"I think what we can offer is to try to show growth at this point in our lives," Petty told writer Alan Light at the time. "A lot of people just give up and do retreads of what they've done before, or I can tell they're not really trying, that they're distracted by other things. And everything is in the shadow of those 30 hits you have, those really big songs. Everything has to compete with that. So I just have to think, 'Well, this is as good as that. What I'm doing now is as quality work as what I was doing then,' or I'm not going to put it out."

Following his passing, tributes—both musical and written—poured in from all corners of the world from artists including Widespread Panic, Bob Weir, Mike Gordon, Wilco, John Mayer, Bruce Springsteen, The Killers, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Umphrey's McGee, Warren Haynes, Tedeschi Trucks Band, The National, Greensky Bluegrass, Foo Fighters and Ryan Adams. Dylan, who rarely introduces new material in the midst of a tour, also honored his old friend onstage by debuting a cover of "Learning to Fly" the night after what would have been Petty's 67th birthday, in Broomfield, Colo. Our readers also did their part to remember Petty.

After attending three of his concerts over the past 40 years, I became more and more convinced that his true soul still remained in the small town of Gainesville, Fla., where he was raised and started his band. He was like your favorite hat, your most comfortable pair of jeans, and his grace, appreciation and empathy for the person with hardship was evident with a Southern accent.

Gregg Duckworth via Facebook

PRISONER CORRESPONDENCE

Dear *Relix*,
I've been locked up almost eight years on a charge of cultivating marijuana. I am a huge jamband fan. I saw my first Dead show in Hampton and my life was forever changed. I love the Grateful Dead, but I'm also a big fan of Phish, Panic, SCI and moe.

I love shows, I love festivals—I love our scene! I go home in February 2018 and I can't wait to be at some live music again sometime next year, dancing on a lawn with my wife and nine-year-old daughter.

My wife has been on the David Gans radio show discussing my case and the problem of mandatory sentencing in the federal system. I was blessed to get almost six years of my sentence commuted by Obama on his last day in office, but there are still so many people locked up with ridiculously long sentences for something they should never have been locked up for at all in the first place.

I look forward to hitting up the *Relix* booth at a 2018 festival.

Sincerely, Paul Fields

RECORD STORE PROFILE:
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■ Located in the cultural melting pot of Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood, Sweat Records is next to the divey music haven, Churchill's Pub. The setting reflects the burgeoning underground music scene located deep in South Florida. Sweat offers up an inviting selection of unknown and upcoming artists—from both the local and global landscapes—ranging from new indie offerings to electronic outfits. It also boasts its own coffee shop, an area favorite.

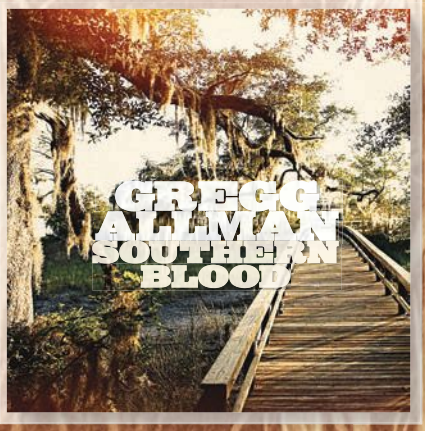
FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

The Avett Brothers performing at Arrington, Va.'s Lockn' on Aug. 27, 2017. Photo by Justin Spalding. Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to *Relix*'s Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finalists that receives the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

■ While New York's Beacon Theatre may have lost its annual, guest-filled Allman Brothers Band March tradition, Tedeschi Trucks Band (@derekandsusan) are keeping the collaborative spirit of that legendary stand alive with an early fall residency of their own. For the seventh consecutive year, the ensemble hosted an early fall run at the Beacon, featuring opening spots and guest appearances from the likes of The Wood Brothers, North Mississippi Allstars, Norah Jones, Jaimoe, Nels Cline, Doyle Bramhall II, John Medeski and Jimmy Vivino. The emotional peak of that run came during the final set of the week when Trey Anastasio emerged to sit in on Leon Russell's "Delta Lady" and a sprawling, epic "Mountain Jam" that stretched past the 30-minute mark.

GREGG ALLMAN
SOUTHERN BLOOD



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BY RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA // PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VANN

Spirit Lake

Benevento/Russo Duo with Mike Gordon

In 2013, after two decades of celebrating Halloween in different corners of the country, **The String Cheese Incident**'s Hulaween tradition found what appears to be its permanent home at the Spanish moss-covered Spirit of Suwannee Music Park. This year's sold-out event drew over 20,000 people to Northern Florida and reflected the wide spectrum of fans that The String Cheese Incident have adopted, especially through dance-friendly events like Electric Forest. During the fest's Thursday pre-party, **Anders Beck** dedicated a stunning 20-minute jam to an attendee who told him that he had hated bluegrass until overhearing **Greensky Bluegrass** on his way to an EDM set at last year's Hulaween; unintentionally passing by their show opened him up to a whole new genre.

Of course, Suwannee Hulaween still has a jamband soul and this year's setlists were dotted with the covers, sit-ins and conceptual themes that are so fundamental to this scene. On Thursday, **Umphrey's McGee** busted out their spot-on cover of Pink Floyd's "Shine on You Crazy Diamond," while **Joe Russo's Almost Dead** maintained their position as the most exciting cover band in action by opening with the area-appropriate "Alligator" and mixing in an array of Dead classics. Friday brought on collaborations galore as **Beats Antique** joined SCI on the main stage for the track "Egyptic" and **Mike Gordon** performed with the recently reunited **Benevento/Russo Duo** for the first time since 2009 on their old standby "Scratchitti." The String Cheese Incident did most of the heavy lifting on Saturday, running through three sets. Their first incorporated classic Cheese tracks like "Sometimes a River" and "Joyful Sound;" their second featured sacred-steel guitarist **Roosevelt Collier** on Tom Petty's "You Wreck Me," and saxophonist and modern-jazz torch-barrier **Kamasi Washington** on "Bumpin' Reel."

The cornerstone of String Cheese's show was their "Night of the Loving Dead" performance. And, while the initial assumption was that it would be a Grateful Dead tribute, SCI subverted expectations by crafting a love-centric set of pop and rock hits, including Beck's "Think I'm in Love," Sublime's "What I Got," Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" and Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," before closing out with The Beatles classic "All You Need Is Love." Later, **Spafford** received extra star-power for their Saturday late-night set with the appearance of **Aron Magner** of **The Disco Biscuits** on "Mind's Unchained" and Tears for Fears' "Mad World."

Though Hulaween started to wind down on Sunday, SCI still squeezed in two more sets, including a sit-in from bluegrass pioneer **Jerry Douglas** on a few songs (most notably their first take on "High on a Mountain Top" in just over a decade). Then, **Ween** closed out the Amphitheater stage with favorites like "Mister Will You Please Help My Pony" and "The Stallion Pt. 3." Finally, as the Spirit Lake art installation glowed in the night, **GRiZ** brought The Meadow, the festival's mainstage, to a close with a signature blend of electronic and organic influences that seemed to encapsulate Hulaween's intertwined sonic roots.

TRIO DA KALI

With the help of San Francisco's revered chamber ensemble, Kronos Quartet, these Mande griot heroes are turning their musical world upside down, or maybe inside out, on *Ladilikan*. By **RICHARD GEHR**

GRIOT MUSIC IS a hereditary affair, and all three Trio Da Kali members hail from esteemed griot clans. Music director and balafon player Fodé Lassana Diabaté learned the xylophone-like instrument from his father, Djeli Sory Diabaté. Singer Hawa "Kassé Mady" Diabaté is the daughter of Kassé Mady Diabaté, arguably Mali's best-known male traditional vocalist. And bass ngoni player Mamadou Kouyaté is the son of Bassekou Kouyaté, the current king of the stringed instrument known for its animal-skin covering. Da Kali means "to give a pledge" in the Bambara tongue, and the vow is fealty to a heritage extending back to the Mali empire's 13th-century origins.

Ethnomusicologist-producer Dr. Lucy Durán assembled Trio Da Kali after working with the three musicians on a film, and proposed pairing the group with the Kronos Quartet. At the time, the San Francisco-based contemporary classical ensemble was looking to partner with Malian musicians for a project backed by the Aga Khan Music Initiative—which supports musicians in Africa, Asia and the Middle East—and had called in Durán to suggest potential collaborators.

"I showed the video of the three musicians to the Kronos Quartet, and they loved the idea of working with them," says Durán. "After that, they became an official trio. The name was my idea—it comes from one of the oldest songs in the Mande griot repertoire."

The Quartet is known for their eclectic collaborations and for covering a diverse mix of acts outside the traditional string-music world. Working with Trio Da Kali was a natural addition to their broad palette, blending the European classic tradition with the rhythmic splendor and vivid voices of West African's ancient folk melodies.

"Trio Da Kali was a manufactured group, if you will," says Nick Gold, whose World Circuit label released *Ladilikan*. "I first heard them as a trio and was blown away. When they started working out their arrangements with Kronos, it became magical."

The magic begins with Fodé Lassana Diabaté, who performs some songs on two 22-key balafons. "The double balafon allows me to play more notes and scales," he said via email, "which widens my range and capacity to improvise and play jazz, blues and now 'classical' music! I saw Kélétigui Diabaté [no relation] play the double balafon in 1991, when I was maybe 20 years old, and knew I had to do this. I designed and made the double balafon I play now."

Kronos Quartet leader David Harrington says he "was in awe," listening to Fodé improvise completely different solo introductions to every one of their sessions' hundreds of takes. "He was focusing and centering himself, and us as well," Harrington says.

Brooklyn composer, musician and longtime Kronos associate Jacob Garchik created string arrangements from Trio Da Kali's demo tracks, revising them based off of the feedback he received from both groups. "Listening to Trio Da Kali's music on headphones for many, many hours while transcribing it was an utter pleasure," he says. "The headphones put me right in the middle of Fodé's balafon, and it was amazing." Fodé's instrument resembles an inverted keyboard, with the bass notes to the right, making

Jay Blakesberg

his bass lines particularly strong and intricate.

Harrington's first encounter with singer Hawa Diabaté was equally profound. "I don't know if you've ever had a Malian praise singer sing to you," he laughs, "but I never had." Hawa heaped melodious praise on the violinist in the London home of producer Joe Boyd. And Harrington was immediately struck by the singer's striking similarities, both vocally and physically, to gospel legend Mahalia Jackson. Boyd brought out a couple of Mahalia LPs from his collection. The resemblance led to the septet recording a hybrid griot-gospel cover of Jackson's "God Shall Wipe All Tears Away," which Hawa sings in Bambara. "The song is about God's grace," explains Fodé. "Even if there are dark clouds in the sky, God shines his light for you to find your path."

Ladilikan's title track, meanwhile, is a Malian version of "I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song," as sung by Jackson on her 1954 album *The World's Greatest Gospel Singer*. "Ladilikan" means "words of advice" in Bambara, and Trio Da Kali updates songwriter Thomas Dorsey's lyrics to criticize the violence of northern-Mali jihadists. "You can't pray on Friday, then go out on Saturday and chop off limbs and murder little children," sings Hawa. Garchik gives the strings a bluesy vibe, Fodé's balafon solo sounds particularly jazzy, Hawa's singing possesses the grainy soulfulness of the late Sharon Jones, and Kronos rock about as hard as they have since covering Hendrix's "Purple Haze" back in '86.

Ladilikan concludes with "Sunjata," part of an epic song about Mali's founder that has been kept alive by griot families for some 800 years. The Trio's interplay is indeed magical, and Kronos' appearance has an appropriately medieval feel.

"I never would have imagined that the balafon could be integrated into a classical context," says Fodé, who composed the album's single vocal-less track, "Samuel," for balafon and string quartet.

The song is now part of Kronos' permanent repertoire and, along with the rest of the album, it makes a strong case for the equality of the European and African classical traditions.

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Soundcheck

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TREY ANASTASIO BAND

THE WILTERN
LOS ANGELES
OCTOBER 31

Trey gets meme

Trey Anastasio has spent many Halloweens with Phish "wearing" an album as the band's musical costume. For his solo band's return to Los Angeles, the singer/guitarist celebrated fright night with a different type of disguise—recreating an internet meme of himself while he took the stage. When Anastasio was candidly photographed weeks ago in New York City pondering a smoothie choice, the cell pic was quickly photoshopped into everything from a *Star Wars* scene to the moon landing. So, as his ensemble lit into the looping groove of "Sand," there was Anastasio, holding his shopping bag, his phone and his pose, gazing contemplatively upward in a perfect re-creation. That brief bit of fun foreshadowed a three-hour merrymaking performance that was wildly spirited and radiant.

Ceding the vocals to saxophonist **James Casey**, the band shifted from the improvisational bliss of the opener into a potent "Soul Planet," then to a churning "Money, Love and Change," with the eight musicians bathed in hazy green splendor. Anastasio's solos here, and throughout, were exercises in patience, establishing themes and then variation, usually circling back to a phrase only to find another thread to follow. Often, he ran call-and-response with keyboardist **Ray Paczkowski** or vocalist and trumpeter **Jennifer Hartswick**, joyously bobbing on "Bounce," or in perpetual motion on "Gotta Jibboo."

The first set had its share of jams, whether wickedly polyrhythmic behind the parade of percussion from **Cyro Baptista** on "Alive Again," or meditative on the unhurried blues of "Dark and Down." There were examples of Anastasio's compositional prowess, too, with the twisting horn lines of "Land of Nod," and a closing rendition of Led Zeppelin's arrangement on "Dazed and Confused." The latter song showcased Hartswick's booming vocals, and a seamless transition from slow and descending guitar bends to pedal-down raging riffs.

The second half rose with a relatively concise reading of the instrumental "First Tube," into a gnawing and unhinged "Night Speaks to a Woman." A beaming "Set Your Soul Free" and contrastingly quiet "Liquid Time" preceded the set's showcase—an extended "Burlap Sack and Pumps," with Anastasio directing the funky foray as his fingers signaled solo turns and key shifts. The pairing of "Everything's Right" and cathartic "Valentine" marked a decidedly lighter tone, while the loose and loping "Alaska" afforded an open range for Anastasio's compelling crescendo. The now-standard cover of Gorillaz' "Clint Eastwood" provided another dazzler from Hartswick before the closing and raucous "Mr. Completely" took flight. The band returned to encore with a nimble "Drifting," then a final treat on the adrenalized "Tuesday."

At one point late in the show, the sold-out Wiltern crowd, mostly festooned in costume, launched a "Let's Go Dodgers" chant—across town, baseball's World Series had evened up on a just-completed victory by the home team. Anastasio and his band let the audience-led refrain build, then dissolve beautifully back into the best Halloween party in town. ***Larson Sutton***

TODD SNIDER

KENT STAGE
KENT, OHIO
OCTOBER 19

Todd Snider embodies an entertainment package that combines melody with insightful lyrics and comedic

Zack Blum (Trey Anastasio)

slacker yarns. Using the timeless configuration of one man with one acoustic guitar, the singer-songwriter—whose stories often veer toward the philosophical—treated the boisterous crowd at Kent Stage to a 100-minute, 23-song set, with numerous stops along the way for him to ponder barflies, stressed out businessmen, drugs and moments of self-revelation.

When he told a story about checking on the occupants of a two-car collision, it transitioned from what could be a horrific, tragic tale of human carnage to a description of a simple act of kindness, and then immediately changed to an account of getting away with a large bag of marijuana.

Snider mentioned his affection for psychedelics during "Ballad of the Devil's Backbone Tavern," which led to a lengthy tale about his first Widespread Panic concert and him eventually singing in Hard Working Americans with Panic bassist Dave Schools. It unfolded as someone living the dream while awkwardly waiting out one jam after another while fronting the band.

The veteran troubadour acquiesced when song requests for "If Tomorrow Never Comes," "D.B. Cooper," "All My Life" and "Statistician's Blues" were shouted, but you could tell, as he peeked at his setlist, that their inclusion was predestined in relation to what *he* had wanted to do.

Early on, he moved to diffuse any possible audience animosity toward his material. "While I might share some of my opinions with you, it's not because I think they're smart or because I think you need to hear 'em. It's basically because they rhyme," he said.

That sense of maintaining crowd control may have caused him to play "Beer Run" early in the set and, after calls for it, "Conservative Christian, Right-Wing Republican, Straight, White, American Males" near the end with "Tension" segueing into an exuberant "This Land Is Your Land."

John Patrick Gatta

Todd Snider rhymes in Ohio

SPRINGSTEEN ON BROADWAY

WALTER KERR THEATRE
NEW YORK
OCTOBER 16

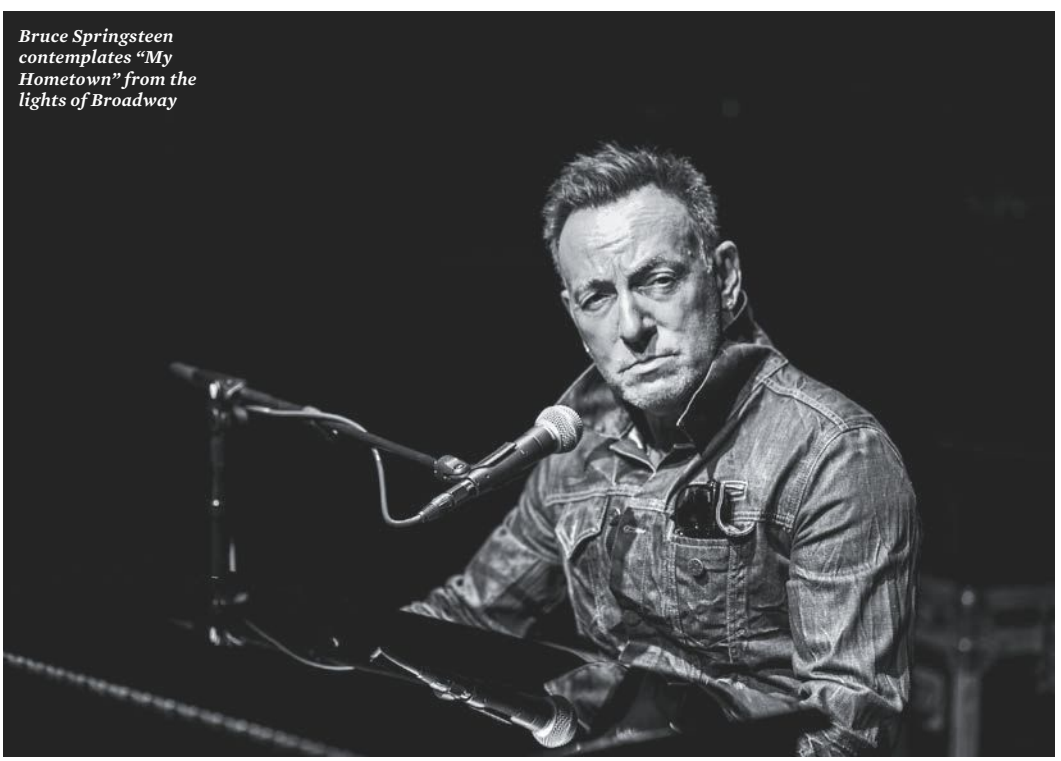
Before **Bruce Springsteen** took the stage at New York's Walter Kerr Theatre, it was apparent that his performance would not incorporate the visual spectacle often associated with a Broadway show. Save for a few road cases, some lights and a wooden stool holding a glass of water, it was just Springsteen and his tools—a guitar, a grand piano and one microphone. And, for an artist whose songs were simple, clear and conscious in this intimate setting, not much else was needed.

The mostly older crowd of Springsteen fans in upscale Broadway attire sat in silent anticipation in plush, crimson chairs, surrounded by the ornate, warm design of the Walter Kerr Theater. A subtle yet enlivened cheer rose from the attentive crowd with the confident first chord of "Growin' Up," a cosmic meditation on adolescence. This fitting musical postcard led to several more tunes that drew listeners into Springsteen's early life. As "My Hometown" gave way to "My Father's House," a deep cut from *Nebraska,* Springteen launched into a monologue about the fear and excitement he felt when his mother asked him to go fetch his father from the bar on late nights. The theme continued with "The Wish," a beautiful ode of gratitude for his mother.

The somber mood lifted with a ripping "Thunder Road," as the no-chorus, myriad of speak-song verses were intertwined with the bright tone of Springsteen's 12-string Takamine guitar. The fan favorites continued with "The Promised Land," the swampy, minor-key acoustic version of protest song "Born in the U.S.A.," and a rousing, grand-piano rendition of "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out." Springsteen then beckoned wife **Patti Scialfa** to the stage. She shared the single microphone with her husband of 26 years, lending gentle harmonies to lovers' rejoices "Tougher Than the Rest" and "Brilliant Disguise."

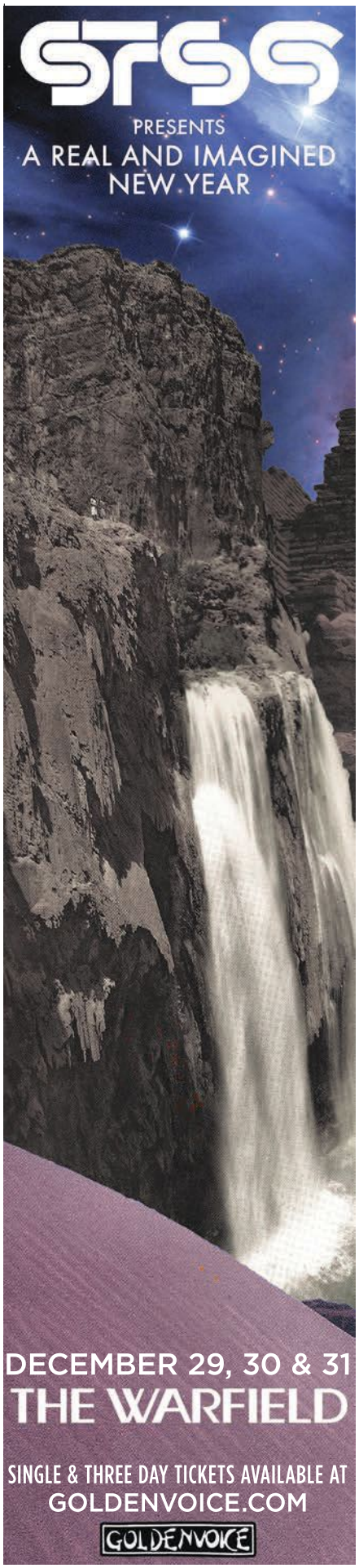
The show concluded with more choice picks, including 1984 hit "Dancing in The Dark," "Land of Hope and Dreams" and the powerful tribute to those lost on 9/11, "The Rising." An ode to the youthful spirit of escape and exploration, "Born to Run" gorgeously showcased Springsteen's brilliant tone and added a bold exclamation point to a performance strongly centered on humanity. "This is the story of me, this is the story of you," he concluded. And after boisterous applause, a humbled crowd filtered out into the Times Square lights.

Brian Stollery



Bruce Springsteen contemplates "My Hometown" from the lights of Broadway

John Patrick Gatta (Todd Snider); Rob DeMartin (Bruce Springsteen)



COURTNEY BARNETT & KURT VILE

FOX THEATER
OAKLAND, CALIF.
OCTOBER 18

A high point of **Courtney Barnett** and **Kurt Vile**'s Oakland concert came when they walked back onstage for an encore set and performed Gillian Welch's "Elvis Presley's Blues." It was one of those great covers that is unexpected, but makes total sense when performed by the right artists. Barnett's vocals were an ideal match for the song; she sang and played electric guitar, while Vile picked on acoustic guitar and added shades of backing vocals to the chorus.

The two indie-rock musicians had just delivered a 12-song set that leaned heavily on tracks from their new collaborative album, *Lotta Sea Lice*. Beginning with "Over Everything," Vile was clearly excited to perform and added shouted "whoops" to the song. Throughout the evening, it was great hearing Barnett and Vile casually pass vocals back and forth like old friends sharing a joint on their new songs "Let It Go" and "Continental Breakfast," along with Vile's "Life Like This."

Both artists commented that it was an honor to have drummer **Janet Weiss** (Sleater-Kinney, Wild Flag, Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks) in their backing band, The Sea Lice. Weiss clearly added swing to Barnett's "Out of the Woodwork" from 2013's *The Double EP: A Sea of Split Peas*. Vile even dedicated his hit "Pretty Pimpin" to the drummer during the encore set.

Barnett's "Depreston" was a crowd favorite in the regular set with Vile really fleshing out the end of the song with a long guitar solo. Before going into Barnett's "Dead Fox," Vile addressed a few audience members yelling "Courtney." "I thank Courtney for taking me on tour," he said humbly. "I was looking for someone to jam with."

Vile was clearly relishing in the collaboration. On a cover of "Fear Is Like a Forest," which is on *Lotta Sea Lice*, he added slashes of Crazy Horse-style guitar. The two's "On Script" also featured Vile adding most of the guitar licks including a thrilling exploratory passage.

The regular set ended with a poignant cover of '90s alt-rock act Belly's "Untogether." Totally affecting, the song found Barnett and Vile's vocals twinning together over some subtly beautiful slide-guitar playing by **Rob Laakso** of The Sea Lice and The Violators. Lyrics like "Sometimes there's no poison like a dream" floated over the quieted crowd.

The evening ended after the Gillian Welch cover with Barnett, Vile and The Sea Lice playing rousing versions of Vile's "Pretty Pimpin" and Barnett's "Avant Gardener." Then, they put down their instruments and continued their conversation on the road. ***Stuart Thornton***

BENJAMIN BOOKER

THALIA HALL
CHICAGO
OCTOBER 16

If **Benjamin Booker**'s debut album was his first chapter, an introduction to a young, energetic rock star with a gravelly voice and an old soul, then his sophomore album, *Witness*, is the point in the plot where the protagonist is faced with a set of challenges. Throughout the record, as well as on the supporting tour, he's noticeably more pensive and frustrated—less likely to work up a sweat and more likely to croon thoughtfully into the microphone. He brings attention to racism, death

Courtney Barnett and Kurt Vile "Let It Go" in Oakland

Stuart Thornton (Courtney Barnett and Kurt Vile)

Benjamin Booker takes on tough subjects

and other tough subjects with crisp lyrics and the retro-turned-modern flair that initially attracted fans to him.

"Hello, hello, hello. It's nice to see you Chicago," he said as he took the stage at Thalia Hall on a warm October night. Not typically the kind of artist to dwell on pleasantries, he launched into the slinky "The Slow Drag Under" from the latest release. Both Booker and his crowd lit up when he revisited his punk/blues-rock beginnings through a noticeably more energetic cut from his debut album, "Have You Seen My Son." While older songs—such as the fast-paced, foot-stomping "Wicked Waters"—picked up the pace, they still felt more mellow than Booker's previous renditions from festivals just a few years prior.

His signature raspy voice took on a strained-yet-smooth shape for "Motivation," a new number about feeling uninspired—something his Monday-night audience could undoubtedly relate to. Halfway through the set, he discarded his deep red Epiphone guitar to focus on his other greatest tool: his voice. He seemed to get lost in his own proclamations as he glided through "Believe," a new tune that saw him nearly floating across the stage, gracefully hopping around on one leg and dipping down to a lower stage platform that brought him closer to his fans.

After "Off the Ground," another new cut, he picked his electric guitar back up and invited **Jessica Larrabee**, singer for opening act She Keeps Bees, to the stage. Larrabee added harmony to "Overtime" and took on Mavis Staples' portion of "Witness," which is the title track of Booker's new album and his most pointed proclamation against social injustice and police brutality.

Booker was at his most vulnerable on "Carry," crooning over slow chords into his microphone, "Even in dreams I don't win/ I don't even get bronze." Electrified versions of "Right on You" from the new album and "Violent Shiver" from the old one seemed to shake the crowd from the trance that they were put into by Booker's vocals mid-set. "This place is ridiculous; I'm obsessed with you," he smirked before a brief exit, only to reappear soon after with the line "This really is my favorite place to play, if it wasn't so cold." Booker ended with "Slow Coming," a song from his first album that nicely fit with his new batch of tunes, before sending the crowd back out into the world that's been dragging him down.

Heather Farr

Kristen Norman (Benjamin Booker)

HERBIE HANCOCK

ORPHEUM THEATER
NEW ORLEANS
OCTOBER 15

Despite his overarching impact on the jazz and funk sounds often associated with New Orleans, Herbie Hancock's recent stop at the beautiful and nearly century-old Orpheum Theater marked his first non-festival performance in the Crescent City in over a decade, and the significance was not lost on the crowd. (Hancock's more recent New Orleans stops included a few special events and a 2016 duo set with Wayne Shorter at Jazz Fest.) A sure sign of the show's importance, the theater's seats were filled with familiar faces like Galactic's Stanton Moore and Lettuce members Eric "Benny" Bloom and Nigel Hall; their presence on a rare night off from their own performances echoed the accolades in the lengthy bio that the program director from NOLA's world famous WWOZ station provided at the top of the night.

From the very first minutes of the nearly two-hour, six-song set, fans were treated to astonishing improvisational wizardry, and palpable chemistry between the four members onstage. Kicking off with a celestial version of Gershwin's "Overture" (that teased the bridge jam section of "Chameleon" for a measure-plus), Hancock's willingness to allow his bandmates equal time to flex their chops kept the audience's rapt attention. Despite this open-source approach to improvisation with his fellow players—saxophonist **Terrace Martin**, current *Saturday Night Live* bassist **James Genus** and Hall of Fame drummer **Vinnie Colaiuta**—Hancock maintained an ascertainable and mellifluous course between each mind-bending workout. The night's strongest product, the buttery R&B-jazz *Sunlight* song "Come Running to Me," elicited an undeniable comparison to recent sounds from artists like Daft Punk— specifically the R&B-leaning slow jams on *Random Access Memories*—or even Frank Ocean. Moreover, Hancock offered a clinic on how to use the vocoder with a delicate and classy touch, which is no small task.

Alternating between the Korg Kronos synth and grand piano (and sometimes hitting both at the same time), vintage Herbie was in full effect during the watery jazz standard "Cantaloupe Island"—a multifaceted tune that boogied its way through funk, classical tinges and stuck the landing back to familiarity in its well-worn melody.

For an encore, Hancock wielded his signature white keytar and led the band through a proficient and high-energy "Chameleon," from the prog-jazz funk *Head Hunters* era. Ending on a swaggering high note, the mostly seated audience was roused up to get down and send off this unforgettable night with the legend and his airtight band in style. ***Wesley Hodges***

Herbie Hancock takes to the keytar for "Chameleon"

Mutual admiration society: Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt

LYLE LOVETT AND JOHN HIATT

TENNESSEE THEATRE
KNOXVILLE, TENN.
OCTOBER 27

Looking like two old friends simply happy to reconnect at a high-school reunion, **Lyle Lovett** and **John Hiatt** took the stage, side by side, at Knoxville's historic Tennessee Theatre in the midst of their extended run together. Lovett noted that he had played the venue before, most recently in the company of Hiatt's daughter Lilly. Acknowledging that he'd henceforth be known as Lilly's dad, Hiatt pointed out that Lovett just became a father himself. Indeed, familiarity was one of the concert's key factors.

After claiming not to know what to play first, they launched into a 28-song set that found them taking turns and tossing in plenty of good-natured barbs, anecdotes and stories from their past. The crowd was clearly unafraid to join in, eagerly shouting out requests and encouragement, which prompted Lovett to tell Hiatt: "I'm glad you've established a rapport with the audience." Building on the laughter, he added, "As our friend Guy Clark once said, 'You succeed if you reach one person at a time.'"

That success continued for the next two hours and fifteen minutes, with Lovett playing the deadpan comedian and Hiatt as his willing foil. When Lovett remarked that the first time he had seen his partner perform, it was with Ry Cooder, Hiatt quickly responded by asking, "How old were you back then? 10?"

While the patter was predominant, once they got rolling, the music took center stage. Lovett's more familiar fare included "She's No Lady," "L.A. County," "If I Had a Boat" and "White Boy Lost in the Blues," and Hiatt tapped into "The Open Road," "Feels Like Rain," "Riding With the King," "Memphis in the Meantime," "Tennessee Plates" and "Thing Called Love." Although they mostly performed solo, Lovett sometimes joined in on the choruses during Hiatt's songs, and Hiatt occasionally repaid the favor by adding lead guitar and backing vocals. Later, when the two traded verses on the gospel-like "I Will Rise Up," there was more emphasis on interaction.

A few seemingly obvious choices were missing—Hiatt's "Have a Little Faith in Me" and "Perfectly Good Guitar," and Lovett's "My Baby Don't Tolerate"—but given the nature of what largely appeared to be an improvised evening, one could hardly complain about a tune or two falling by the wayside. The low-key set up and unassuming intent suited the evening perfectly—all evidence of two plainspoken personas. An intimate encounter, it had the audience feeling like a fly on the wall and particularly privileged to witness it all.
Lee Zimmerman

Alisa B Cherry (Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt); Wesley Hodges (Herbie Hancock)

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MIKE RYAN

By **BRADLEY TUCKER**

MIKE RYAN currently serves as general manager of the Fox Theater in Oakland, Calif. Though he has only held this job for just over a year, he's been at the Fox and part of the Another Planet Entertainment family since he joined the box office team in 2009. Ryan's worked at a number of APE venues over the years—including the famed Bill Graham Civic Auditorium. He attributes his progress in the industry to his steady commitment and willingness to do anything that's thrown his way, as well as being "the frontline to the concertgoer" while working in the box office early in his career.

What was the live music scene like where you grew up?
I moved to Orange County, Calif., from a small town on the East Coast when I was in middle school. I was blown away by how present music was in everyone's lives, and I stumbled into the punk and metal scenes during my formative years. Southern California had some great all-ages clubs—places like Chain Reaction in Anaheim, The Glass House in Pomona and SOMA in San Diego—that showcased great local bands and smaller nationally touring acts. Chain Reaction was the closest club to my house so it became the venue that I frequented the most.

Was there a job at the venue that particularly interested you?
I was always intrigued by the way I was greeted when walking up to a venue. Even at a young age, I realized what an impact that initial interaction can have on your experience at a concert. Did someone welcome you and politely ask you to have your bag ready for a search when you reached the front doors, or was someone gruffly making demands and shuffling you around like cattle? At the time, I figured it was just the personality of the people working the door that made that experience pleasant or contentious. It wasn't until I started managing staff later in life that I realized that it's largely how you approach and interact with those staff members—[creating] an atmosphere of friendliness among the venue staff carries over into their interactions with patrons.

What was your first job in the music business, and what led you to it?
When I was a freshman at San Francisco State University, I joined the street team for the High Sierra Music Festival. I handed out flyers in front of venues after shows to earn a pass to the festival. My first full-time job in the industry ended up being with HSMF a few years later as their ticketing operations manager. I worked closely with the owners of the festival on a year-round basis, and they taught me the importance of patience and understanding when interacting with patrons. I think one of the biggest reasons High Sierra has such a sterling reputation is because of their willingness to adapt to their festivalgoer's feedback—they truly care about their experience. That had a profound impact on me.

Describe an influence at the outset of your career.
One of the first odd jobs I worked was security for Hardly Strictly Bluegrass in Golden Gate Park. I was doing backstage security, and I remember getting to work early in the morning and meeting with the stage managers. I was taken aback by how happy everyone was to be there. Everyone was sipping their coffee and cracking jokes, despite the insane hours they had worked the day before and the hours that lay ahead of them that day. I felt out of place because everyone there knew each other from either this event or the other hundreds of events they probably worked together, but I didn't feel ostracized. I wanted to have that feeling, so I started introducing myself to anyone who stood near me for long enough.

What was an early lesson you learned?
The earliest lesson I learned was to make myself available and take initiative. I worked a couple of shifts for Another Planet in my early days sorting and distributing will call. Every time they called me to work, I took the gig and when I was there, I tried to learn as much as I could. The best lesson I learned was to show up a little early. In my case, I got a few minutes alone with the person in charge and learned a thing or two about the ticketing system, which made me an asset.

I honestly think that everyone in the music industry should have to work a shift in the box office. You are the front line to the concertgoer. I was taught by my box office managers at APE venues to make sure that people walked away happy because you can really have an impact on the rest of their experience.

What's the best part about your job? What's the worst part about your job?
The best part of my job has been learning from the people around me at Another Planet Entertainment. The well of experience that's there for me to draw from is practically endless, and the attention given to every aspect of the concert experience speaks volumes about the people behind the company. They always give consideration to what will make the show better, whether that's supplying the venue with the best sound and lights possible, a comfortable backstage space for the artists or thinking of creative ways for the audience to feel welcome.

Because the company is owned and operated locally, the principals of APE are always stopping by shows at the Fox; they make suggestions for a new sign here, or a way to improve this space to make it more inviting over there. It's taught me that there is no use pretending like you know it all and instead, learn from the people who helped write the book on this business.

Where are you when the show is going on?
All over the place—monitoring the flow at the front doors, checking in on tour production, talking with patrons and staff as things come up. If I find myself in one place for too long, it's time to start moving. There's always something happening somewhere in the venue.

OTEIL BURBRIDGE

Water in the Desert BY DEAN BUDNICK

"EVERY SONG ON this album is about love in one way or another," Oteil Burbridge explains of his latest record, *Water in the Desert*. The nine originals capture the emotion in its many iterations, exploring the challenges and heartaches of interpersonal connection, as well as the moments of pure bliss.

While as of late, the bass player has found himself in new musical climes through his work in Dead & Company, that milieu is not reflected in the material on *Water in the Desert*, which he composed nearly a decade ago. "I had just taken my band off the road and began to make an effort to spend way more time at home," he recalls. "I had just met my wife, Jess, and, when I realized how happy I was at home, I didn't want to be on the road all the time anymore. So I stopped solo touring. I started writing those songs right after we met but, as life progressed, I kept delaying finishing them. In my defense, we did move three times and have a baby, but I finally just decided to put it out [in order] to be able to move on to the next one. My head is in a very different place now, but it is an accurate picture of my mindset at that time in my life, and it was indeed a precious time to me."

Burbridge acknowledges that he can be self-critical in assessing his studio efforts, even as he identifies some of the progress he's made over the course of his solo recording career, which began with 1998's *Love of a Lifetime* and includes *The Family Secret* (2003) and *Believer* (2005). "I'm never happy with any of my records. I'm too judgmental of so many little things," he reveals. "The live ones seem to turn out better, as far as what I'm looking for in music. There's something about the energy of being put on the spot and not having the choice to change any of it later that puts you in the magic zone. But I had an amazing group of people on this record, and that certainly translates when you hear it. There was a good feeling in the studio because of the people that were participating, and you can feel that when you listen to it. Music is all about the feeling it gives you, so in that sense, I'm very happy with it. And though I'm no Joni Mitchell or Robert Hunter, my lyrics are better than [they were on] my last two records. I'm not a poet, but I have things on my mind that I feel are more meaningful than the usual materialistic shallow stuff I hear—what Cornel West refers to as 'bling bling, g-string.'"

Burbridge enlisted a series of Atlanta-based musicians to join him on *Water in the Desert*. First and foremost, the roster includes his older sibling Kofi, who appears on keyboards and flute. Oteil explains, "I didn't want it to be a 'bass guitar' record. I wanted to feature Kofi and the singers more than myself, honestly. I wanted people to hear the Burbridge Brothers in their natural element." The pair were joined by guitarist Dave Yoke, drummers Lil' John Roberts and Sean O'Rourke, and Miguel Atwood Ferguson on strings. Producer David Ryan Harris, Alfreda Gerald and Mark Rivers handled most of the vocal duties, while Burbridge himself stepped in for the LP's moving final track.

WATER IN THE DESERT

"Water in the Desert" came about because I was on the hunt for an older style of gospel music that I only had heard on records. But I lived in Birmingham, Ala., so I knew it still had to be around there somewhere. A friend turned me on to this church called First Baptist Church of Kingston. The Pastor, Rev. T.N. Miller brought me to tears every time I went there. "Water in the Desert" is my tribute to that church and Rev. James Cleveland, The Fairfield Four, Aretha Franklin and all the other gospel artists whose music fed me so much spiritually back then. Lyrically, it is simply stating that the act of loving another person, God, whoever, is what heals best. It is about action as much as—or more than—belief. Abraham Joshua Heschel said that when he marched with Dr. King in the civil rights movement, he was "praying with his legs." It's about action. Alfreda is amazing on this song—truly amazing. Wait till you hear her do it live.

CHASING

This song is about a man and a woman who are both cheating on their spouses with each other. They're both chasing after something that they already have. It's about the futility of the destructive side of desire, about love left behind. Most of us chase after what we already have at some point in our lives, though it takes different forms. It could be anything from cocaine to donuts. Mark Rivers sings this one beautifully. I love the cool organ part that Kofi does in the verses too. I don't know how he pulls the draw bars on the organ in such perfect rhythm, but it's a cool effect.

Continued on page 76

AVEY TARE

By **MIKE GREENHAUS**

DAVE PORTNER had high hopes when Mickey Hart reached out about his new project, but even he couldn't have predicted the album's most surprising guest—Jerry Garcia. "It's crazy when you start working with your heroes," the uncharacteristically gushy Animal Collective co-founder says. "I worked with Arto Lindsay very briefly when I was much younger, but becoming an actual collaborator with someone like Mickey isn't something that's happened to me often in the music world."

In 2009, Portner, who performs as Avey Tare, officially entered the Dead's orbit when Animal Collective became the first outside musicians to receive a license to sample a Grateful Dead song, "Unbroken Chain," on their tune "What Would I Want? Sky."

While the jamband universe often feels worlds away from the high-art indie-circles that Animal Collective primarily associates with, Portner guesses he's spent more time

listening to the Dead than any other act—he was first introduced to Brian "Geologist" Weitz when his future bandmate walked into their high school wearing a Dead t-shirt. (They proudly boast that, after some hesitation, they showed Josh "Deakin" Dibb "the light;" Noah "Panda Bear" Lennox's primary psychedelic-rock influences lie elsewhere.)

When Hart was looking for some modern voices to mix into his new, highly percussive solo record, *RAMU*, his team reached out to the members of Animal Collective to gauge their interest. Portner jumped at the opportunity and spent time working with the Grateful Dead drummer at his Northern California ranch. Dead scribe Robert Hunter delivered a new batch of fresh lyrics for the project and, when Hart decided to weave some recently unearthed archival recordings into the sessions, Portner found himself in the same credits as Garcia himself.

"I was a little uncertain what my role would be or what it would be like working with Mickey," says Portner, who sings on tracks like "Wayward Son," "You Remind Me" and the Garcia-stamped "Time Beyond Reason." "It lives up to all I had come up with in my own head, in terms of that process and everything I've taken from the Dead's music."

The full-circle moment capped off a busy year for Portner, during which he embraced the *collective* part of his band's moniker. In addition to proper Animal Collective tour dates and the release of their eighth EP *The Painters,* Portner has shared some concert bills with Weitz and recently offered the first-ever live recreation of his band's 2004 crossover *Sung Tongs* alongside Lennox. Closer to home, he also released a new, intimate collection of "sunset and sunrise" recordings, *Eucalyptus*. Though billed as his second solo record, as opposed to his various collaborative LPs and his more formal side-project, Avey Tare's Slasher Flicks, Portner worked on *Eucalyptus* with Dibb, and with musicians Jessika Kenney and Angel Deradoorian.

About five years ago, after watching many of his friends move West, the Baltimore-bred Portner relocated to Los Angeles. He started writing what would become *Eucalyptus* as a low-key project in 2014 before focusing his creative energies elsewhere.

"I was winding down from the previous Animal Collective album cycle and just wanted to settle down in LA and find some balance," he admits. "I was doing a lot of electric guitar with Slasher Flicks, so I was using this as an opportunity to play some acoustic guitar at home in my bedroom—and usually the first ideas I had each day were what I wound up keeping."

Portner's life in California served as a compass as he searched for the album's themes; he honed in on his adopted home's hiking trails and mountains and also found inspiration in the similarly serene landscapes of Hawaii. Slowly, he started to piece together the "electroacoustic movement."

"I wanted them all to stick together like a journey, but then I started getting caught up thinking about it too much," he admits, noting that it took him a while to finish the LP's final tracks like "Ms. Secret" and "When You Left Me." "The most rewarding musical situation is when there is the perfect balance between your intuition working and creativity working, and a little bit of intention."

Eucalyptus connected some more personal dots too, and not just because "Jackson 5" nods to the universal feel of the first concert that Portner ever attended. "I view the microcosm as the macrocosm element of life," he says. "I look for patterns in day-to-day living, something that happens in the grander scheme. Staying up late to watch the sunrise has been a recurring theme in my life that started as a kid hanging out with my cousins and my family—those first moments being free. That's transferred into my life on tour with the band, who are like a family. We'll often be up until almost the sunrise. There's something unspoken between people who experience something as brilliant as the sunrise—a secret of the universe."

Last year, Dibb, who has sat out AC's most recent recordings, pushed Portner to revisit those songs. "Like it is with all of us in Animal Collective, studio [sessions] are the longest periods of time we can spend with one another, so it becomes this opportunity to just have a good time," Portner says. "We've developed this intuitive process. Josh has become so good at recording on the computer; it's really his strength at this point."

In between the initial writing and the release of his new album, Portner switched gears and regrouped with Animal Collective to release 2016's *Painting With*, one of the ensemble's most upbeat and accessible albums. The balance is something that Portner has grown to appreciate.

"We wanted *Painting With* to be more outward and to translate live—touching on themes that weren't necessarily as self-centered," he says. "*Eucalyptus* felt like going back to our days recording in a bedroom with no expectations."

Portner notes that his recent time with Hart took him back to those halcyon days when he first started to delve into the Dead's various eras and stylistic shifts. As he worked with Hunter's lyrics, he also rediscovered the beauty of collaboration. "It's taught me to move through things sometimes—to embrace working intuitively without even writing," he says. "It's very Grateful Dead to me."

Atiba Jefferson

ODESZA

By EMILY ZEMLER

CLAYTON KNIGHT and Harrison Mills, the duo who record and perform as ODESZA, fully understand that, in order to create, you have to build something and then take it apart. And, on their new album, *A Moment Apart*, the electronic duo allowed experimentation to lead them forward before taking a step back and stripping down each song.

"It's a simple idea that evolves into too much, so we have to pick out what fits and what doesn't," says Mills. "It's an emotional process. You get attached to the sounds after you've been working on something for so long. Even though it's not helping the song, you may have a personal preference for some of the elements. It's a lot of trial and error. We've found that simplicity is best. That's what's crazy—the simplest song can be the hardest song to make. It's something we've always known, but we've gotten better at it as time has gone on."

ODESZA have been working on new material since the release of their last album *In Return*, which came out in the fall of 2014. They completed the opening and closing tracks first, using them as bookends, and then worked their way inward. Mills and Knight wrote the record on the road, as well as during sessions in Los Angeles and back in their Seattle studio. The extensive tour behind *In Return* impacted the pair's new batch of songs, even though they didn't intend it to.

"You might get too accustomed to trying to hit everything really hard or being really energetic on the road," Knight says. "We actually come from a slow-tempo, ambient-style music background. But being on the road for two years influenced us. It made the songs more energetic and helped these heavier, denser pieces be created."

"You try to remove the live setting because we like to make more personal albums and more headphone music," Mills adds. "It's a little more intimate. If you let the live setting influence that too much, it takes away from that."

A Moment Apart is a lush, sweeping collection of electronic tracks, bolstered more by arching melodies than thumping beats. Their initial idea was to pair upbeat, pop-laden hooks with a melancholy aesthetic, creating a balance between light and dark. The album opens with a quote from the film *Another Earth*, which Knight sees as a reflection of the songs' overall sentiments. "If I had to put it into one word, the album's theme is 'perspective,'" he notes. "That quote says that in a lot of ways."

As on previous efforts, the band collected a diverse array of vocalists to appear on the album, from Regina Spektor to Leon Bridges to Naomi Wild. It was Spektor, however, who really wowed the band. "We've been fans of her for a very long time," Mills says. "We told our manager—half-kidding—that we'd like to have her on the record because we didn't think it was feasible. A month or two later, she emailed us saying she wanted to work with us."

Spektor invited the band to her hotel room before a Seattle gig and sang the vocals she had written for a track they had previously sent her. The result was "Just a Memory." Mills admits, "It was a pretty jaw-dropping moment."

"It felt very circular for me, being such a fan of her when I was younger, never fathoming I would work with her one day," Knight adds. "On the actual song, we were trying to recreate that moment in the hotel for the listeners."

Since the release of their 2012 debut album *Summer's Gone*, ODESZA's live show has taken on a life of its own. The pair now sells out venues like Morrison, Colo.'s Red Rocks and even headlined the Staples Center in Los Angeles in October. The musicians credit their festival runs, from Bonnaroo to Bumbershoot, for helping them reimagine their tracks in a live setting—onstage, everything has to be as high-energy as possible, which is not necessarily true for their albums.

"We consider our live show such a different beast," Knight explains. "We rewrite almost every song for the live show. We have horns and we're playing drums. There's a lot of elements we try to add. Our albums are these more introverted experiences, and our live shows are extroverted, community-based experiences. We really try to match the setting of the place we play. When we approach live stuff, you really have to pick and choose your down moments. The contrast makes more sense than trying to make people have a meditative moment."

The tour, which goes until the end of 2017, takes ODESZA to Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America, and reveals a refreshed live experience. And, in certain ways, *A Moment Apart* is just a blueprint for the duo's dynamic set.

"We spend so much time on our live shows," Mills says. "We hoped for this level. We know we're putting on a show and we want it to be theatrical and have a lot of different moments that shift and feel almost like a play. We want you to go on a journey in different genres of music and to encapsulate a lot of things within one show."

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

THE WEATHER STATION TORONTO, CANADA

Headphone Folk

There's an obvious contrast between **The Weather Station**'s last two album covers. On 2015's *Loyalty*, **Tamara Lindeman** stood with her back to the camera, hands twisted together seemingly in anxiety, while on this year's self-titled record, the Toronto singer-songwriter faces the camera, staring down the barrel of the lens with determination and focus. "I wanted it to look like a Tom Petty album or something," she says, phoning from her mother's home in rural Canada, before the Heartbreaker's untimely passing. "I wanted it to be super direct because the album is more direct. It's totally my vision. I made all the decisions. It's me. So I was like, 'I better not hide. I better make it clear that this is what I am.'" Lindeman spent years refining her sound, which evolved from atmospheric instrumentations to lyrically poignant folk. Yet, all of her music contains a certain vulnerability and poetic spirit—a direct line from Lindeman's psyche to her listeners' headphones. "I've always made headphones music because that's how I primarily listen to music," she adds. "Words are really important to me. And nuance. So I feel like personal engagement is my jam." And while *Loyalty* was an experiment in emotive subtlety, *The Weather Station* has teeth. Songs like "Thirty" and "Kept It All to Myself" are upbeat and rollicking, two adjectives that, in the past, you wouldn't use to describe Lindeman's sound. "This record feels like a bit more of a beast. It has a very different spirit. I don't know if it's subtle. It came from this feeling of necessity." theweatherstation.net ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

Perry Shimon (The Weather Station)

WAND LOS ANGELES

Reaching for the Unknown

Wand have a sharks-never-sleep attitude. On *Plum*, the quintet's latest, they've found a place where the almost robotic pleasures of krautrock fuse—or at least coexist—with the majestic undulating melodic arcs of the Dead's *American Beauty*. Listen to "The Trap," "Bee Karma" or "Driving" for the ways in which Wand can be both complex and organic. The band recently morphed from a trio to a five piece, and there's been a corresponding expansion of sound to go along with the lineup change. Before the shift, Wand had burned through the release of three albums in around 18 months. Recalibrating their efforts to a quintet format required a small pause, a brief hiatus—at least in terms of what had been a steady output of recordings. "Most of that time was just spent playing," says guitarist and singer **Cory Hanson**. The time spent in the rehearsal space experimenting with the improvisations that became the core of the album's songs, along with the fine-tuning of the material during live shows and the ultimate recording process put the band on a course for more explorations. "We're not interested in taking another break," says Hanson. "We're totally in unit mode. It's sort of to our advantage to keep playing because, the minute we stop playing, we sort of lose ground." Though Wand has a restless productivity that comes, in part, from the world of DIY/punk, Hanson and some of his bandmates also share an art school background where they inherited an attitude of "rigorous critique." That meant that Wand made sure their music withstood a relentless level of scrutiny. It also allowed the band the opportunity to hone their chops to an almost exhaustive degree. "I was totally indoctrinated to tinker with things obsessively and talk about things obsessively," says Hanson. The band has faith in the idea that collaborative, improvisational, open-minded experimentation can lead to an uncharted musical place. There are moments on the new record that suggest the epic ambitions of bands like Radiohead and My Morning Jacket. "If we're going to make anything that is ours, that is entirely our own, then there's going to be a bit of risk," he says. wandband.info ***John Adamian***

BOOMTOWN CROOKS JASPER, CANADA

The Never-Ending Journey

While **Boomtown Crooks** are a rock-and-roll band at heart, the Canadian-bred, California-based outfit has graciously invited elements of blues, folk and funk into their music. "Sometimes, people want us to pick a genre, and we are just not willing to do that. We follow our own path," says frontman **Zac James**. The band's debut album, *This Is a Robbery*, is a true fusion of genres. "FUBAR" and "Tomorrow's Rain" have a folky bent and possess a rough, Western twang, while the final track, "The Funk We're In," is more reminiscent of a Red Hot Chili Peppers number. Overall, the themes of their songs—as the name Boomtown Crooks might imply—explore the pursuits of whiskey-drinking, Marlboro Red-smoking and rock-and-roll-playing outlaws. Staying active on the road and in the studio, the Boomtown Crooks are set to record a second album, *List of Demands*—one that James hopes will skew in a "jammier" direction. "I love [*This Is a Robbery*] but, for the next album, I want more music instead of mostly lyrics so that you can hear the different guitars and sections we have." Though James admits he still has room to grow as an artist, he's satisfied with the road the band has taken thus far. "It's all about the journey," he says, "and, so far, it's going really well." facebook.com/boomtowncrooks ***Catherine Araimo***

HANNAH WICKLUND AND THE STEPPIN STONES

NASHVILLE, TENN.

Rock-and-Roll High School

Hannah Wicklund's rock-and-roll baptism came early. At age six, the South Carolina native performed Beatles songs on the piano during setbreaks at gigs for her older brother, Luke Mitchell. "I was hanging out in Hilton Head bars watching him play, with my mom knitting in the booth," remembers Wicklund. She made a switch to electric guitar and, at nine years old, after turning down a shot at Broadway, assembled the first incarnation of her band, **The Steppin Stones**. The group cut their teeth on classic-rock standards, playing five shows a week for spring breakers and the Hilton Head summer set. By 16, Wicklund had graduated from high school and taken to the road full-time. She was also building a repertoire of original material, inspired by her sibling's songwriting skills. "He was my guiding light in showing me the difference between just playing cover songs and playing songs I'd written," she says. Even today, there is a song from one of her nascent pre-teen EPs on her setlist. With influences like Tom Petty for conscious song crafting and Jimi Hendrix for guitar pyrotechnics, Wicklund, now 20, is anxious to unleash a more mature album from her power trio. Recorded at Paul Moak's Smoakstack studio in Nashville, the forthcoming January release will feature a song co-written with Cage The Elephant alum Lincoln Parish, but the rest of the as-yet-untitled collection is Wicklund's own coming-of-age thesis. "I have this authentic background to draw from," she says. "I feel like there is actually a point of view." After dropping the LP, the singer-guitarist is looking forward to co-headlining with Mitchell's The High Divers for the "Sibling Rivalry" tour. Even after over a decade onstage, Wicklund says she is just getting started. "I love the road. This is the coolest thing to do with my time right now."

hannahwicklund.com ***Larson Sutton***

SUSTO CHARLESTON, S.C.

Awake to Themselves

Charleston, S.C. quintet **SUSTO** tackle some heavy subjects: alienation, addiction, damnation, religious hypocrisy, redemption, death—the whole deal. The group takes its name from the Spanish word for a kind of spiritual crisis, a psychic rupture, a major-league freakout. "I like exploring darkness and almost forcing people to as well," says frontman and primary songwriter **Justin Osborne**. But SUSTO doesn't paint only in deep, dark, existential colors—the band has made a habit of offsetting their weighty material by recording lighter, semi-goofy tunes with some religious implications. In 2016, they released a track called "Chillin' on the Beach with My Best Friend Jesus Christ" and, earlier this year, they were working on a song called "R.I.P. Santa" for the holiday season. "We do these little vignettes between records—they tend to be a little more humorous," says Osborne. On their latest record, last year's very catchy and emotionally hefty *& I'm Fine Today*, SUSTO pulled off a neat trick, hitting some mellow and smooth Americana-pop buttons and evoking the sound of the Wallflowers or Counting Crows, while telling stories with surprising grit and gutpunches of truth. Osborne was raised in a fundamentalist Christian household, and some of his songs have been about coming to terms with his relationship to religion—he's an atheist now—and the cosmos. His lyrical skills are reminiscent of The Hold Steady or Drive-By Truckers in their willingness to wade in up to the neck in charged matters of significance. Chemically induced mind-alteration has been part of that journey for Osborne. "Psychedelic drugs have made me who I am," he says. But he and his bandmates have spent much of the past three years on tour, and he says the psychedelic experience isn't one that's conducive to being pent up on the road or in a club. "Sitting in a van for six hours on acid is not the same as riding bikes at the beach." Still, an evolving perspective is always the goal. "LSD—whenever I was on it—I was thinking in a different way. You come out of those experiences, a little more awake to yourself." The band plans to pause the ceaseless motion for a spell in the New Year and go into the studio again. Osborne says he's got about 30 songs already written, awaiting culling, fine-tuning and full-band treatment.

sustoisreal.com ***John Adamian***

GROUP AT WORK

LOST BAYOU RAMBLERS

Kaleidoscopic Cajuns

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL Friday afternoon in New York City, and the Lost Bayou Ramblers are soundchecking at Joe's Pub. As Andre Michot warms up on his handmade accordion, his brother Louis throws his voice around the empty venue—his Cajun-French lyrics bellowing through the room with authority.

"We're definitely a live band," Andre explains. "As much as the last couple of albums have laid things out and experimented with different ideas and techniques, it's still hard to capture that in the studio." Louis agrees: "We improvise our shows pretty much entirely," he says. "We barely write a setlist. Even in the middle of songs, we're switching from one number to the next."

The Michot brothers have been the driving force in the sextet's off-the-wall performances since 1999, and that determination has paid off. They secured an opening spot for Arcade Fire in 2014 after Win Butler and company saw them play at the 2013 Montreal International Jazz Festival, and they count Violent Femmes' Gordon Gano as a close friend/collaborator. LCD Soundsystem producer Korey Richey is also a frequent creative partner; he sat at the helm for Lost Bayou Ramblers' trippy, ambitious 2012 release, *Mammoth Waltz* as well as their newest offering, *Kalenda*.

"Korey has tapped into the larger music scene and has a very global mind, but he grew up as a rice and crawfish farmer from South Louisiana," Louis explains. "He knows the music, and you have to know the music as a language to understand it."

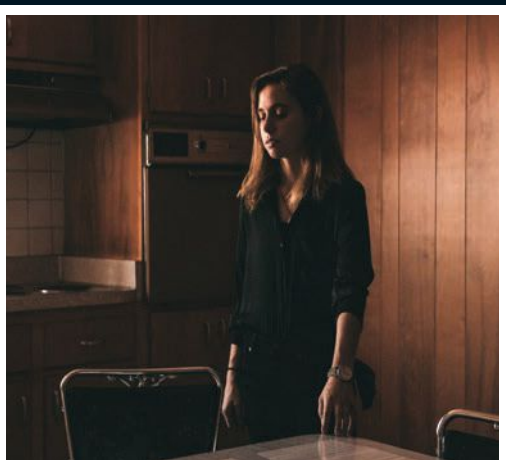
Starting out in their South Louisiana family band and cutting their teeth on classic-rock covers in high school, the Michot brothers crafted a unique sound that mixed their bluesy, deep Southern swamp roots with a hip, improvisational edge. "We weren't like, 'Let's start a Cajun band that's going to be expansive and psychedelic and all this stuff!'" says Louis. "That happened 10 years later, and we're almost on year 20 now. We're still learning how to integrate the music we love from across the world into our sound. With this album, we really wanted to simplify and not overthink anything," he continues. "Here's the song. Let's just play it. And love it. And play it like we love it."

Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

WOMAN AT WORK

JULIEN BAKER

Punching the Devil



JULIEN BAKER IS A few hours away from stepping onstage at Madison, Wisc.'s Majestic Theatre, but she's about to slip out the door.

"I just found out that Every Time I Die is playing down the street an hour before my set," she admits, copping to loving the band's thrashy punk. On the surface, her own music—gorgeously melodic, sparse torch songs—is decidedly un-metal. But in between the pretty moments, Baker works up goosebump-inducing intensity that'll leave you shaken up. And her second album, *Turn Out the Lights*, out on Matador this fall, is full of them.

Baker's 2015 debut, *Sprained Ankle*, was a stripped-down, almost painfully personal affair, released when she was only 19. With *Turn Out the Lights*, she's layered her sound to match the same punch as her lyrics. On the meditative "Sour Breath," she's looking at a crumbling partnership, realizing, then howling, "The harder I swim, the faster I sink."

"I write to expel the thoughts I'm grappling with over whatever conflict has arisen," she says. "And once all that raw material is out, I begin to sift through it. As the song becomes clearer, my thoughts on the situation usually do too."

However, clarity doesn't mean simplicity, and Baker's writing on *Turn Out the Lights* captures the push and pull—and the wandering and doubting that people go through when hashing out the tribulations of their relationships with themselves and with others.

That honesty has struck a chord with fans, critics and artists. "The ability of an incredibly specific story in a song to resonate with other people has been amazing to me," she says. "It's much less about the details of that song, and more about the emotions that I felt."

Baker wrote and produced the album herself, recording the 11 tracks in her hometown of Memphis. Arcade Fire and The National associate Craig Silvey mixed the songs, creating a wide, expansive sound, even when it's just from Baker and her guitar.

Spending the fall working her way through the States and Europe, she took her brutal expulsions to crowds full of proven fans and newcomers alike. It's a daunting task when your songs contain admissions like, "When you watch me throwing punches at the devil/ It looks like I'm fighting with me/ But there's a comfort in failure/ Singing too loud in church/ Screaming my fears into speakers/ Till I collapse or I burst/ Whichever comes first."

Then again, they won't fall on deaf ears. These are the types of thoughts that everyone has. It's just that this time, they're brought into the light. ***Justin Jacobs***

Zack Smith (Lost Bayou Ramblers)

WILLIAM I.AM

The Smashing Pumpkins' longtime leader strikes out under his given name with an acoustic album inspired by his behind-the-scenes love of Neil Young and Bob Dylan. *By* **WILLIAM PATRICK CORGAN**

MY NAME has become this running joke throughout my life and, as I approached my mid-century mark, I started telling friends that I should go back to my Christian name, William. Growing up, I wasn't Billy. My dad was Bill, so I jokingly started saying to people, "Call me William." So Billy always felt a bit weird, like a stage name.

When I asked people to start calling me by my given name, it was almost like I was holding up a pinky drinking tea. It was a strange reaction; I just love stuff like this. It amuses me and, after all these years, the fact that something still amuses me is a good thing. In the world we live in today, people are a little scared to ask if they should call me William or Billy. But I really don't care. I've always been identified on social media under my full name and I've released a few records as WPC. It causes this funny confusion, so I'm just going with the confusion of it all. It seems to generate some sort of energy that doesn't make any sense to me, but it's OK. It's very strange to have people react negatively toward me for using my real name. It's not like I suddenly decided to call myself "Quasar 42."

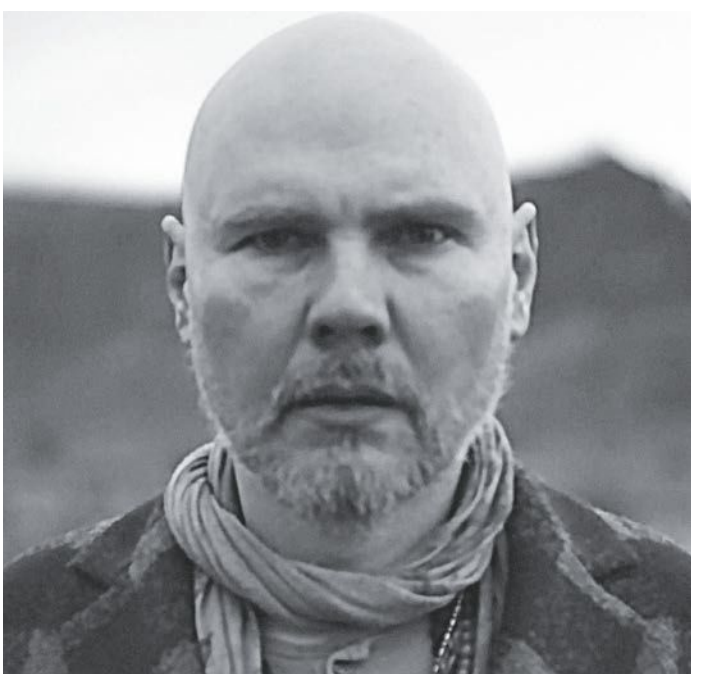
Ogilala started while I was doing a Pumpkins album—a follow up to the last album we released. I lost my mind and I was like, "I can't do this." So I quit that. And then I found myself a bit depressed, and thought, "I'm just going to go back to writing songs. As long as I write some good songs, the songs will tell me where to go." It was just about writing and not worrying about what pile they went into. I ended up really liking them, and called up Rick Rubin and said, "I'm doing this solo acoustic work. Can you recommend a producer—a wiz person or a rising star?" And he said, "Well, I'm really interested in that. Will you send me the songs?" So I sent them to him, and he called back and said, "I love them. Write some more." That was the boost in confidence I needed.

I've always been a huge fan of Bob Dylan and Neil Young. In many ways, that's more the music that I would listen to in my personal life. I was always super attracted to the raw quality of their music and I would play that stuff behind the scenes. So it just all seemed to come together—"I've done everything else, maybe it's time to finally just be myself without all this adornment and confusing public persona—all this stuff that I've gotten into over the years that amuses me and makes people crazy." It felt right. Maybe I was in the right place in my life—I'd just had a kid—that it felt OK to say, "I'm going to do these songs." And don't forget, I had Rick standing next to me. And if he thinks they're good, they're good. So I didn't have to carry this weight myself; Rick carried it for me.

To me, the argument about music aesthetics is always a really bourgeoisie one. My father used to say, "Music is music." Duke Ellington said, "There's two types of music: Good music and bad music." For somebody who grew up on heavy metal, hard rock—Deep Purple, Jimi Hendrix, Black Sabbath, The Cure—to me, it was always like, "Why do I have to fit in some lane?" That was always something that critics really struggled with [in regard to] the band—"What kind of band are you guys?" We're like The Beatles or Led Zeppelin; we just want to do what we want to do. And if we want to do a psychedelic song or a country song, we'll do it.

The box thing was always a head-scratcher for me. It's not the way I approach my music. What ends up happening, particularly with generational memory, is that it gets very reductive. You never consider when you're 30 years old that somebody is going to water down everything you've done to: "You're the 'rat in the cage' guy." But what about a song like "1979?" That's not really the same sound, yet your reality doesn't register on the rival that made it. They call us a grunge band, but we had more hits with non-rock songs—with strings, acoustics or drum machines—than with rock songs. And we live in a culture now where arguing is pointless. It doesn't matter what I say. I've learned to accept that and be cool with it, and just be happy that somebody even knows something, and go from there.

It's not that I have a hostile opinion of my past; I don't like people defining my past *for* me. I want to be able to say, "This is the past that I recognize. This is the past that I feel closest to." There are some songs that I really love and, when I try to play them acoustic, I think, "It just doesn't feel right." It's not that I'm not conscious of expectations and things like that, but I just try to be honest about it.



In October, William Patrick Corgan released his second solo album, Ogilala, *and first under his full name, which featured a reunion with former Pumpkins guitarist James Iha. Corgan supported the LP with an intimate solo tour, offering a scrapbook-style look at his deep musical catalog as well as unexpected covers of Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush," the Grateful Dead's "Box of Rain" and Miley Cyrus' "Wrecking Ball," among others.*

DOPAPOD

Singer/keyboardist Eli Winderman digs into his band's fifth studio album, *MEGAGEM* and their unorthodox decision to take a yearlong pause while their popularity is still peaking. *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

FREEFORM FOCUS

We started working on *MEGAGEM* a couple of years ago. We like to let our songs develop on their own over time live and, once we have a bunch of songs, we'll go into the studio. For the most part, our songs start with a demo of mine that's 70 percent done and then the guys will add different riffs, words, lyrics and their own personalized touch to everything. A lot of times, [guitarist Rob Compa] and I will sit down and write the lyrics and, sometimes, we'll put in weird words that our bass player [Chuck Jones] wrote down that don't make any sense. [*Laughs*.] We always try to keep the process of writing very open to everybody's ideas and explore every path possible.

I reached out to our fanbase on Facebook and asked if anyone knew of a place where we could record in Colorado because we were gonna have some time off there and, through that, I found Mountain Star Studio—a solar-powered barn in Black Hawk, Colo. The walls are lined with this recycled Styrofoam material that is sound-absorbent so we went in there and set up our gear and mics. Our crew helped us but then, for about a week, it was just the four of us up in the mountains—high elevation, a lack of oxygen. We started every day with some totally free-form improv, and we recorded everything. We ended up with 13 or 14 songs, plus a bunch of improv; "Buster Brown" came completely from that. So we already have enough for another album, but we decided to split it up so that it would fit onto a vinyl.

ONE STEP BACK, TWO STEPS FORWARD

We've been touring pretty heavily for the past seven years and are starting to feel a little worn down—not out of gas completely, but on fumes. We've been aware of this for a long time and, in the past, we've always tried these mini-breaks, but that didn't seem to alleviate the pressure much. It just felt like the years kept compounding, and we couldn't really catch up. We'd already recorded *MEGAGEM* and were having a band meeting in the middle of a tour—we were being honest about how we felt and about needing a break. Our drummer [Neal Evans] also showed us this TED talk—["The Power of Time Off"]—about a guy who owns a design firm in New York City. Every seven years, he closes it for a year; everyone at the company focuses on their own personal projects and then, they reform. And the effects are profound—everybody involved is rejuvenated and has these new ideas, outlooks and attitudes. So that was our inspiration—let's try a longer break that we know is gonna be a year and plan it out accordingly, come back with another new album and start touring at more of a reasonable pace so that we can sustain this for years to come. It's normal for people who travel a lot to feel burnt out, so this is our way of trying to take a step back so that we can take two steps forward.

SQUAD GOALS

We've talked about something like this before, but this band has been our only income for years now, so the thought of not touring is just this huge life change, and it's really scary for all of us in a lot of ways. It's a risk and it opens up the possibility of not coming back. Part of the goal is that everybody can also start to develop their own ways to bring in some income so that we don't have to tour all the time. Chuck and Neal have a trio called Mom And Dad, and I started this band, Octave Cat, with Jesse Miller from Lotus. I've also been messing around on drums. I've felt that, as a songwriter, I'm always critical of the drums and I want them to sound a certain way, and it's been fun to drive the sound in that way.

Outside of music, I'm planning to spend a lot of my time doing volunteer work because I want to try and improve myself as a person. I also plan on doing a lot of yoga and meditation. There is a big shift when you end up back in normal society after being part of this tribal community where you're with your brothers out there. It's not as extreme as a PTSD thing for someone in the military, but it's along the lines of having to completely change your way of life. And so I'm trying to take a bunch of steps to help that transition happen smoothly.

"HARDER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER"

Everybody's at a different place on their journey, so there's no rules for this break; we could come back in six months and play a show or it could end up being three years. We just need to regroup without having the pressure of trying to make this thing continue to succeed; we need to remove that to focus on other things in life and, eventually, come back to it as stronger people and, hopefully, that will bring it to the next level. We have almost a Dopapod East and West happening—we're spread out, but we're spread out into two units. I'm in Philly, Rob is in New Jersey and then Chuck, Neal and our light/sound guy Luke Stratton live in Colorado. They're able to hang out, go on all these camping trips and have their soundchecks together. We use JamHub, which is a headphone mixer that you can plug like 7 people into, to practice remotely.

RETURN OF THE JEDIS

I compare [our scene of bands] to *Star Wars*. We are continuing the tradition of the past Jedis, while all these other people are trying to be DJs. We are all interconnected as bands, too. Dopapod originally started at the Berklee College of Music in 2008—inspired by the Benevento/Russo Duo and Soulive—with me and current Turkuaz drummer Michelangelo Carubba. Neal was in Turkuaz for a while and we were all simultaneously splitting time between the two bands for a few years. It's a point of pride that we are trying to keep this thing alive because there's something really special about people playing off of each other that you just don't get from playing off a computer—this tribal group of friends that you watch onstage. You can see the changes every night.

RELIX DIGITAL SAMPLER

Download the tracks for free at relix.com/downloads

1 Lilly Winwood

"London"
From the EP *Silver Stage*
Wincraft Music Inc.

Silver Stage, the debut EP from Lilly Winwood, chronicles a coming-of-age journey with an English take on traditional American roots music. Lilly has established herself as a writer that's wise beyond her years through her soulful guitar-playing and quick-witted lyrics.

lillywinwood.org

2 Petunia and the Vipers

"Harvest Time"
From the album Petunia and the Vipers
Self-Released

Describing themselves as somewhere between Elvis Presley and Tom Waits (plus the foot-stomping fury of Hank Williams), Petunia and the Vipers have a crafted a sonic identity that is unquestionably their own. The scope and range of Petunia's influences differ as much from one album to the next, as they do from song to song, but one constant is how this band is always unique.

petuniaandthevipers.com

3 BJ Wilbanks

"Healin' My Blues"
From the album *BJ Wilbanks*
Self-Released

Georgia-based BJ Wilbanks' exploration of love and pursuit of enlightenment, aka "Back Porch Soul," fuses Americana, Motown and Delta Blues into an intoxicating blend of Southern Rock. His self-titled album captures the refined analogue production qualities of yesteryear, reminiscent of bygone era when music was so good, it transcended genre.

bjwilbanks.com

4 Moses Guest

"Black Road"
From the album *Light*
Aufheben/ Floating Records

2017 marks Moses Guest's 20th anniversary as a band, and they are celebrating with the release of a new album. Light evokes a sophistication that can only come after decades of playing together, but the essence of the Moses Guest sound remains the same: it's southern, it's classic, it rocks, and it jams!

mosesguest.com

5 Bad Dagger

"Soothsayer IV"
From the album *Soothesayer*
Self-Released

Disco. Metal. House. These words are fundamental to the mission statement of Indianapolis dance powerhouse Bad Dagger— The world's original innovators of and true source for pure, high-grade Electrosexymetal™. The trio features Cameron Reel on electronic production, synths and bass; Eddie Roodvoets on drums and sample pads; and Brice Jones on guitar.

baddagger.com

6 Natchez Tracers

"Zeroes and Ones Galore"
From the album *Zeros and Ones*
Pharr Out Records

Since 2014, Nashville Tennessee's NATCHEZ TRACERS have tapped listeners' hearts and minds while providing infectious, foot-tapping grooves. "Zeroes & Ones Galore" explores topical social unrest through sonic exploration reminiscent of epic 70's rock, while showcasing the band's more blues-based, psychedelic rock & funk influences.

natcheztracers.com

7 Low Flying Birds

"Last Stand"
From the album *Low Flying Birds*
Self-released

Low Flying Birds is an original outlaw bluegrass jamband hailing from the historic college town of Chico, Calif. (it's also the home of Sierra Nevada Beer!) Using rich three-part harmonies and impressive musicianship to bring their original compositions to life, the band and their memorable songs evoke great American themes of beauty,
love and greed.

reverberation.com/rpk/lowflyingbirds

8 Psychedelic Monks

"Packages of Mustaches"
From the album *Not Exaggerated*
Self-Released

The Psychedelic Monks are a Florida funk-rock band with an abstract approach. With influences from all over the musical spectrum including jazz, prog, latin, and all types of jambands, The Psychedelic Monks have been known to throw full-on dance parties while taking their audience on a journey through the cosmos.

thepsychedelicmonks.com

9 Chris Antonik

"I'd Burn It All Down (For You)"
From the album *Monarch*
Self-Released

Guitarist Chris Antonik was nominated for Best New Artist at Canada's Blues Awards in 2011 after the release of his debut self-titled album. In the past, his innovative, thoughtful songwriting along with his stunning blues guitar work has drawn comparisons to Eric Clapton, and in April 2017 he released his third album Monarch. Catch Chris on tour in the southeast US this winter.

chrisantonik.com

10 Matt Duncan

"The Keys"
From the album Soft times Hop Hop/Soul Step

Matt Duncan is a singer, songwriter, and producer originally from Lexington, Ky., currently living in Brooklyn. He has released four albums, the latest being The Slowest Walkers In Manhattan. For this LP, Duncan enlisted the band from Broadway's "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," who he met through his day job at the production.

matt-duncan.com

11 Holy Hand Grenade

"Bumping Into Strangers"
From the album Bumping Into Strangers

Chaifi Studios

Holy Hand Grenade wants to see you on the dance floor. Hailing from Brooklyn, they've been kicking around the NYC groove music scene for the past few years, collaborating with members of Antibalas and others. Fans of El Michels Affair, Eddie Harris, and Ethiopiques alike will not be disappointed.

hhgnyc.com

12 Upright Man

"Ecstasy"
From the album Upright Man
Self-Released

New York City-based rock band Upright Man is Aidan Dolan (guitar/vocals), Nick Katz (bass/vocals) and Max Yassky (drums/vocals). Combining elements of alternative, psychedelic, and rock and roll with complex harmonies and time signatures, the band seamlessly intertwines their influences into a distinct sound of their own.

uprightman.band

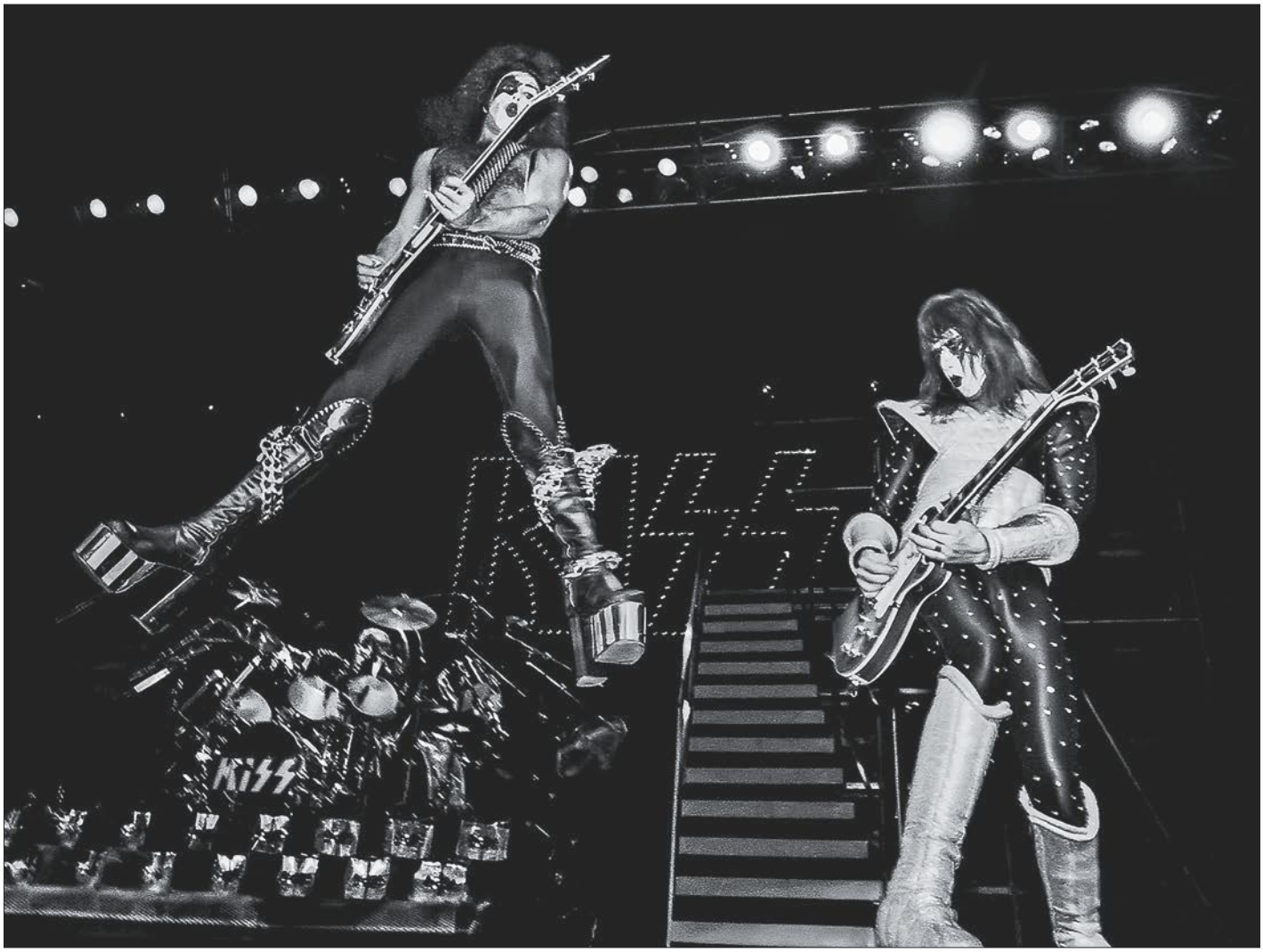
13 Dirty Rob

"Lost Weekend"
From the album Nine Years Mourning
Self-released

Many personal tragedies have interrupted Dirty Rob's mission to create "modern psychedelic rock you can dance to." He almost completed Nine Years Mourning, when both of his parents passed and his best friend was murdered. Over the next few years he kept getting delayed, but now this ten-track LP is ready for release including lead-off track "Lost Weekend."

facebook.com/dirtyrobmusic

LYNN GOLDSMITH



▲ *Photographing KISS in concert was always fun because of the crowd. Their fans were so devoted that many came dressed as their favorite member and then, when KISS hit the stage, they hit it with real power. Paul was fearless in those boots—jumping to new heights. I wouldn't even try that in sneakers!*

VETERAN PHOTOGRAPHER Lynn Goldsmith first met Gene Simmons in 1977 when she was assigned to shoot the makeup-clad KISS singer/bassist for the cover of *Circus* magazine. They immediately bonded over their shared background—Jewish children of single mothers and recipients of teaching degrees—kicking off a lifelong friendship. Later that year, Goldsmith met the rest of KISS when she documented their *Alive II* rehearsals at an Air Force base in Newburgh, N.Y., where she struck up a similarly deep friendship with singer/guitarist Paul Stanley.

Goldsmith was born in Detroit in 1948 and went on to become one of the first female rock-and-roll photographers as well as an acclaimed film director and celebrity portrait photographer. In October, she released her favorite KISS shots from their classic years as the beautiful hardcover book *KISS: 1977-1980*. In her introduction, Goldsmith admits to "appreciating singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen or Paul Simon a great deal more than the music of KISS, but who would I rather photograph or pay to see in concert? No contest," later adding that KISS and the KISS Army "form a country of their own, where the only rules are that you be in charge of your own life, be authentic to what you want to be and what you want to do, and not worry about what anyone else thinks of you. Let your freak-flag fly!"

Both Simmons and Stanley provide captions for their non-biological "cousin" throughout the expansive compilation, which was published by Rizzoli, offering an inside peek at the KISS members onstage, in the studio and at the makeup table. "The book brings back memories of a magical time and a magical place," Simmons says. "When we all dreamed big and wanted to reach for the stars."

I loved the smoking dragon they used onstage, especially for photos. KISS was truly theatrical. They always thought about the experience that their fans would have at a show, and wanted to make what they did onstage bigger and better every year. Forty years later, and they still do.

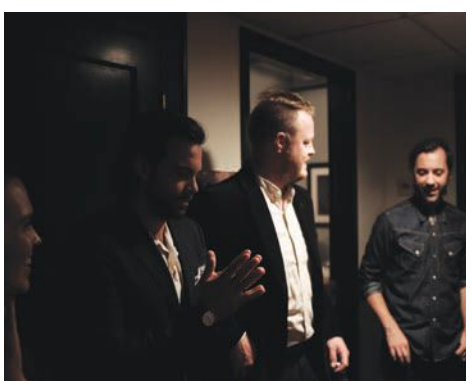
I loved to photograph KISS because it was all about their characters and, once in makeup, you never had to tell them how to be or make them comfortable—their self-invented personas became real. It was fun to figure out what props to have in the studio. I bought the fake blood with hopes that Gene would drink from it. However, I was concerned about the possibility of it ruining his new outfit—thank goodness, Gene was not! He just goes for whatever it takes to make an impactful image.

Paul and I used to talk about him looking for true love. Unlike Gene—who did not believe in monogamy—Paul was looking for something deeper than just a sexual relationship at the time. I made this background with the heart especially for this shoot because I felt he understood the powers of romantic love.

THE LONE BELLOW

THE LONE BELLOW still remember where they came from. The New York-bred, Nashville, Tenn.-based indie-Americana outfit has spent the two years since the release of 2015's *Then Came the Morning* gradually playing to bigger and bigger crowds. So, when it came time to roll out their new LP, the Dave Cobb-produced *Walk Into a Storm*, lead singer/guitarist Zach Williams, mandolinist/bassist Kanene Donehey Pipkin, guitarist Brian Elmquist and keyboardist/bassist Jason Pipkin decided to return to the intimate space that nurtured them during their grassroots rise through the New York-club ranks: Rockwood Music Hall. The rare club date, a special WFUV members-only performance that is now available to stream on the station's website, arrived during a jam-packed media blitz that included high-profile programs such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *CBS This Morning* (as well as a welcome return to our Manhattan offices for a "Live at Relix" performance). Yet, The Lone Bellow have still won over the majority of their fans road-warrior-style, and this fall, they brought their powerfully played, tenderly written roots-rock songs to esteemed spaces like Chicago's Thalia Hall, Washington, D.C.'s 9:30 Club and The Opera House in Toronto. And, if the group's dynamic recent support spots at Morrison, Colo.'s Red Rocks Amphitheatre and New York's Central Park SummerStage are any indication, then it won't be long before The Lone Bellow headline those marquee stages on their own.

Got to meet Guillermo! It finally happened.



Pre-show at Jimmy Kimmel Live! *Our publicist Meg Helsel, Zach, Brian and Jason.*

Soundcheck for CBS This Morning.

This is Rockwood Music Hall Stage 2 in New York City on the Lower East Side. The goal is to get back and play here as much as possible. We played the album front to back here during a small unannounced show for local NPR music station, WFUV.

Red Rocks in Morrison, Colo.—the best venue on the planet. There isn't much on the road that beats playing here. We've played here twice before, but this is the first time sans a torrential downpour.

At Windy City LIVE *for ABC7 Chicago—not seen in this photo are the four kids we had out on the road for this run who raided the station's greenroom.*

This was our rehearsal before the tour started back in September. The perk of living in a smaller town is you get your own life-size practice space.

STEPHEN STILLS AND JUDY COLLINS

Almost 50 years after their love affair began, two of the most distinguished voices of the '60s and '70s settle down for their first collaborative album and tour. By **MIKE GREENHAUS**

THE ELEGANT, ART Deco-style Carlyle Hotel is located on 76 Street and Madison Avenue, in the heart of New York's Upper East Side. Though its address and facade feel worlds away from the folky, Greenwich Village scene that originally drew Judy Collins to Manhattan in the 1960s, these days the hotel seems like one of the last vestiges of late-20th-century New York. Collins—who lives across from Central Park with her husband, artist Louis Nelson, and also keeps a place outside the city—has turned the Carlyle into something of her public living room in recent years, thanks to her multi-night runs at the lobby café. The space even served as the backdrop for the now 78-year-old singer's 2013 appearance on HBO's *Girls*, helping her voice reach a whole new generation.

Today, however, she's camped out a few floors up the attendant-operated elevator in a stunning suite, where she's congregated with her onetime romantic partner and muse Stephen Stills to chat about their joint LP, *Everybody Knows*, over tea and coffee. They're also nearing a pause during their first tour together and, while the music and stories have been career-affirming, Stills says life on the road is reminding him of his age. "I have a hearing problem that precedes music, from when I was 9," the 72-year-old Stills says after he settles into an armchair. "Gov. Huey P. Long built the system where his doctor friend had an Airstream with a doctor's office, and they visited every school in every parish in the state of Louisiana, and gave every child a physical. That's when I discovered my hearing loss and they said that, depending on what you do with your life, it'll get worse over time. I might've gotten an infection from swimming in the bayous or killed a mosquito inside my ear—any number of things could've caused it, but nonetheless the damage was done."

"But look what he's been able to do!" Collins chimes in from across the coffee table, her voice hitting a pure, natural frequency usually reserved for a proud parent.

Stills has been part of Collins' life ever since they met at a Cream show at Los Angeles' Whisky A Go Go 1967, yet *Everybody Knows* is the first full-length release under both of their names. A family scrapbook mix of well-curated covers, reworked originals and even a new Collins composition, the album and its accompanying tour have given the lifelong friends the rare chance to present their relationship in song-cycle form.

"It's very intriguing—we've been together for so long, it's almost like being in family counseling," Collins says with a laugh. "We have an internal dialogue going on with the music between 'Suite: Judy Blue Eyes' and 'Judy,' both of which Stephen wrote years ago, and my song for Stephen, 'Houses.'"

Stills, who has devoted most of his onstage attention to his bluesy supergroup The Rides since Crosby, Stills & Nash unraveled in the press last year, simply seems to enjoy spending time with his old friend and flame.

"When it gets too close to couples therapy, I throw in a wisecrack that'll break that up right away," he says with a hearty chuckle. "This whole transparency thing has gone too far. I'm tired—I was raised in the age of discretion. There are some things that are just unbecoming to speak of."

At this point, your lives have been intertwined for almost half a century. Did you feel an instantaneous spark at your initial meeting?

JUDY COLLINS: We started spending time together when he came to play on *Who Knows Where the Time Goes?* in 1968—it was a great band, including Van Dyke Parks, Chris Ethridge, Buddy Emmons, James Burton and Stephen. Stephen had just dismantled Buffalo Springfield and he was brilliant. I flipped out over him, and that's where it all started. We had a wild career.

STEPHEN STILLS: We were going to do *The Tonight Show*

With Johnny Carson, and Neil [Young] realized he was going to get his big nationwide break with the band, and he got cold feet and decided to go out on his own. He wanted to anyway. I understood, but it also completely screwed us over because I didn't have the group together for the Monterey Pop Festival.

JC: And there he was, free for the summer. Of course, we had an affair. As short lived as it was, it was very important in both of our lives, and he wrote the song "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes." We've never lost touch with one another.

SS: I did all kinds of little conniving things to be near her. I got myself assigned to take the back-cover photo of Judy's family for the album. I said, "I'm a photographer!" That meant I had a Nikon. So I went up and took the pictures on the porch of the whole gang, and I underexposed them. And [people] were furious with me, but totally understood—it was about the girl. It's a little dark but you can see everybody, and the focus was brilliant.

It's rare for well-known artists, who were never in a band together, to have such a lengthy and consistent snapshot of their 50-year friendship.

JC: It's our musical selfie—a picture of where we've been since we were suddenly integrated into each other's lives and where we are now. Yes, it was a love affair, but it was also a historic interplay of our interests. It's amazing that we've remained friends all these years.

In the early part of 1969, I decided to put out a songbook of my previous albums, and he said to me, "Why don't you write about your family?" He was already writing "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," which I didn't know yet, and he already knew what an interesting, fiction-worthy family it was.

SS: Both of our families! We put the *fun* back in "dysfunctional." [*Laughs.*] There's a fine line between dysfunctional and interesting.

JC: That's right! So, I came out to California and we got a suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I would be in the room during the daytime writing my seven chapters, while he was recording with Crosby, Stills & Nash. So he got me started writing a memoir. This latest one is my ninth or tenth book. Our lives are just so enmeshed with one another's. His sister did some beautiful watercolor prints for my songbook. One is in my studio in New York, and the other is in my living room. When we broke up, it was more like a family disaster than a breakup.

SS: It wasn't a breakup; it was, "We should marry other people!"

How would you describe your relationship after your love affair ended?

JC: We always stayed in touch with each other. There would be a critical time when I needed to talk to somebody that I could trust. When I got sober in 1978, I came back to New York and called him. I was going to go down to Florida and see him. I was in the kitchen and I remember him saying, "You can't come. You're not going to be able to stay sober here. It's a wild thing that's going on..."

SS: It was the whole studio—not just us. The place was crazy. I'd have good days, where I'd get there early and get a lot done, and then it would deteriorate into bedlam and there would be bad days. But she was trying to stop. This was not the place to come.

JC: So, he saved my life.

SS: I put my foot down about it. I said it in a tone that I hoped conveyed the seriousness.

JC: Oh, I heard you.

SS: I wasn't angry or anything. It was just, "You shouldn't come here."

Though your offstage friendship remained strong, you've never collectively released an album under both of your names. What finally got you into the studio for *Everybody Knows*?

SS: There was a time when CSN was obviously just tired—we'd had it for a while. So that was when she came in and said, "We've got to do this now."

JC: I've been on the road by myself for decades, and I've loved every minute of it. But it seemed like time for us [to tour together], and we had to make a record so we'd have something to sell. He came to New York in 1969 and played with me at Carnegie Hall, and we did a duet on an old Tom Paxton song five or six years ago on an album of mine called *Paradise*. We once were on Graham Nash's TV show and Stephen played guitar for me on that. Otherwise, except for one event where we sat on the stage and told stories, we've never done something like this, so it's a big deal for us. We texted one another with lists of songs and met in New York and LA to have dinner and talk about it, and finally, it seemed to be time.

SS: We'd have a three-hour rehearsal once a month for about three months. I went, "This is crazy. We're not ready." And sure enough, we had a live recording of the opening song, for instance, and it kills what we have on the record. [*Laughs.*] We finally got the phrasing really tight. And [Judy's longtime musical director Russell Walden] also has an instantaneous appreciation for the fact that my lead guitar is one of the voices and how that should be placed. He really paid attention to what I played, which was a new experience for me. [*Laughs.*]

Though, my hearing aids pick up the cymbals a lot more than anything else. They told me that my hearing would be bad at this age, but they also told me that they would have remarkably better hearing aids. And there's $6,000 worth of stuff in my ears! What the fuck? I've had to fuss at people to adjust just a little bit. At cocktail parties I'm useless or, in a restaurant, I can hear the busboys clatter and everyone else around me, but I can't hear the person across from me. [The white noise] is like a flock of geese.

I'm sure you both had your own expectations going into these sessions. What impact did the recording process and resulting tour have on you personally and creatively?

SS: She reminded me how to say "yes" because she said "yes" to everything, and it makes it so much easier. And she taught me not to project all of the things that could go wrong, and say, "Let's not do that. We'll fuck that up." We can be really bad for a few days, but we shouldn't worry about it. That's the secret of getting an ensemble together. I've been able to play much softer then I have been for years, without Crosby's "hell rig of the Pacific."

JC: When we started recording, Stephen said, "We should have skipped the romance and gone straight to this." [With this band], I knew I'd be protected, which is always my ultimate concern. I could lose my mind thinking about the mistakes we could make, but I had no anxieties or feelings about this—it all fell into place.

One of the ancillary benefits of this is drawing our audiences together. We have audiences where people mostly listen to CSN and audiences that are coming mostly for me. And the ages are getting wider and wider. We'll get people our age, and then younger and older. And that's a marvelous concoction that's come out of this. That's part of the pleasure of being introduced to one another's music.

SS: Some younger people come to hear my guitar playing and also the young folkies want to hear the old folk songs—we're old masters of that.

Your songs feel particularly relevant given the current political climate.

JC: That's right. Trump is trying to change it back [to a bygone era] but we'll get him. When is the mental-health community going to catch up with this guy?

Continued on page 77

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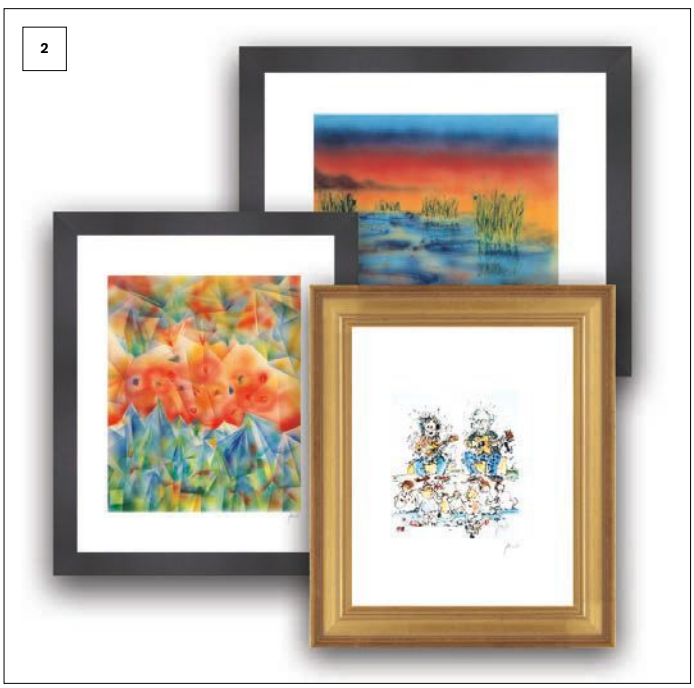
THE 2017 *RELIX* HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

It's that time of year again, and we're here to help—from your favorite rail-riding partner to the littlest rager on your shopping list, there's something for every music lover in our year-end roundup.



1) Vibes
Vibes Hi-Fi Earplugs are reusable, virtually invisible earplugs designed for live music. Forget traditional foam earplugs that block and muffle sound. Vibes lower the volume to a comfortable level that keeps your ears safe, but still allows you to hear the music clearly. Each pair also includes a carrying case and three sizes in every box to ensure a comfortable fit!
discovervibes.com

2) Jerry Garcia Collection
The Jerry Garcia Collection is the official estate collection of Jerry's paintings, totally re-mastered with state-of-the-art digital technology from Jerry's originals and produced as exceptional museum quality limited edition framed prints. Guaranteed heirloom quality to pass down to generations.
Jerrygarciacollection.com

3) Mason Jar Speaker & Guitar Amplifier
Who said portable speakers have to be boring black boxes? Grab a Mason Jar Speaker to play tunes from your smartphone via any device with a headphone port. This clever little product also works as an electric guitar amplifier. Build it yourself with the DIY kit, or buy one ready-made. Rock on!
trashamps.com

4) SanDisk iXpand Base

The perfect accessory for the iPhone lover in your life, the SanDisk iXpand Base makes it quick and easy to back up and charge your phone at the same time. No cloud storage fees, no complicated set up and no extra cables or dongles to mess with—all you need is your lightning cable. Simply plug your iPhone into the iXpand Base with your lightning cable and let it automatically back up your photos, videos and contacts while you sit back and relax.
sandisk.com

5) Sebastien Grey

Subtle yet sophisticated, Sebastien Grey has perfected the balance of modern dress for donut fans. From swim trunks to ties, sports coats to bath robes and dress shirts to polos, they've got you covered. Shop **sebastiengrey.com/donut** to win Phish Skybox tickets during the 2017 holiday run!

6) Pokketmixer

Pokketmixer is the first portable mini DJ mixer for everybody. It's light, fast to set-up and pocket-sized. Plug and play. Mix all music to start a party!
pokketmixer.com

7) Mr B's Festival Needs

What's in Mr. B's Mystery fun bags? It's a mystery! Each Mystery Fun Bag is unique, hand drawn, and stuffed full of mysterious fun by Mr. B and his elves! At only $5 each, they make perfect gifts and stocking stuffers for everyone on your list! Appropriate for Kids & Adults ages 4 - 104. Guaranteed MYSTERY...Guaranteed FUN.... Guaranteed BAG! One for $5...Five for $20.
Festivalgeneralstore.com

8) Martin D Jr.

The affordably priced Martin D Jr. is ideal for anyone looking for a small-bodied guitar with the clarity and depth of tone that has defined C.F. Martin & Co. instruments for more than 180 years.
martinguitar.com/guitars/junior/d-jr

1) PAX 3

PAX 3 is the most recent iteration in PAX Labs' award-winning namesake line of intelligent, sleek, portable vaporizers. The innovative device is dual-use and can be used with loose leaf and concentrates, features superior heating, haptic feedback and is compatible with the PAX Vapor App to provide users with the most enjoyable vapor experience possible. Available in new matte Black, Teal, Silver, and Rose Gold anodized aluminum colorways, the PAX 3 now ships in two package options: complete kit and device only. **paxvapor.com**

2) DaVinci Vaporizer

The DaVinci IQ dry-herb vaporizer is what the future of cannabis use looks like. Slick, app-connected and with a unique 51-light grid interface, it's setting the standard for a market that's just getting warmed up. **davincivaporizer.com**

3

2

3) Instrumenthead

Imagine your favorite musicians like you've never seen them before. This award-winning *INSTRUMENTHEAD* book is a surrealist look into the soul of a musician—not through their eyes, but through their instrument. Featuring more than 360 different musicians, three variant covers and three different types of fine art photography paper, this is the perfect gift for any music and art lover. **instrumenthead.com**

Books and Music For the Deadheads in Your Life

4) Josh Baron and Jay Blakesberg, *Eyes of the World: Grateful Dead Photography 1965-1995*

5) Peter Conners, *Cornell '77: The Music, the Myth, and the Magnificence of the Grateful Dead's Concert at Barton Hall*

6) Mickey Hart, *RAMU*

7) Bob Weir, *Blue Mountain*

8)Jerry Garcia and Merl Saunders, *GarciaLive Volume Nine: August 11th, 1974 Keystone Berkeley*

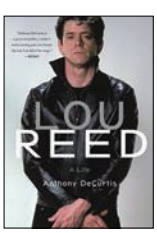
9) Jerry Garcia Band, *GarciaLive Volume Eight: November 23rd, 1991 Bradley Center*

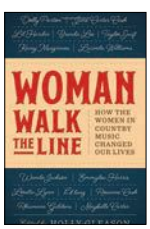
10) Grateful Dead, *Long Strange Trip Soundtrack*

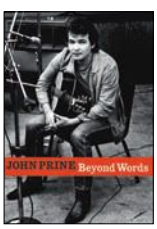
11) Grateful Dead, *May 1977: Get Shown the Light*

12) Grateful Dead, *Robert F. Kennedy Stadium, Washington, D.C., July 12 & 13, 1989*

13) Bob Minkin, *The Music Never Stopped – Marin County's Music Scene, Photographs*







The Sounds of *Relix* (music from the pages of the magazine)

Alison Krauss, *Windy City*

Chicano Batman, *Freedom Is Free*

Chris Robinson Brotherhood, *Barefoot in the Head*

Deer Tick, *Deer Tick Vol. 1 & 2*

Dispatch, *America, Location 12*

Fleet Foxes, *Crack-Up*

Gov't Mule, *Revolution Come...Revolution Go*

Gregg Allman, *Southern Blood*

Jack Johnson, *All the Light Above It Too*

Jackie Greene, *The Modern Lives Vol. 1*

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, *Flying Microtonal Banana*

Neil Young, *Hitchhiker*

Portugal. The Man, *Woodstock*

Primus, *The Desaturating Seven*

Real Estate, *In Mind*

Ryan Adams, *Prisoner*

Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *So It Is*

The Barr Brothers, *Queens of the Breakers*

The National, *Sleep Well Beast*

The String Cheese Incident, *Believe*

The War on Drugs, *A Deeper Understanding*

Twiddle, *Plump (Chapters 1 & 2)*

Yonder Mountain String Band, *Love. Ain't Love*

Books

Anthony DeCurtis, *Lou Reed: A Life*

Jessi Colter with David Ritz, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith that Brought Me Home*

Bruce Dickinson, *What Does This Button Do? An Autobiography*

Holly Gleason, *Woman Walk the Line: How the Women in Country Music Changed Our Lives*

Lizzy Goodman, *Meet Me in the Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Roll in New York City 2001-2011*

Scott Ian, *Access All Areas: Stories From a Hard Rock Life*

Noel Monk with Joe Layden, *Runnin' With the Devil: A Backstage Pass to the Wild Times, Loud Rock, and the Down and Dirty Truth Behind the Making of Van Halen*

Anna Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music*

John Prine, *Beyond Words*

Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run*

Derek Thompson, *Hit Makers: The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction*

GIVING THE GIFT OF MUSIC TO YOUR CHILDREN

With the holidays around the corner, we've reached out to The Rock and Roll Playhouse to curate a list of gifts for the musical children in your family. Amy Striem, an early childhood and elementary school teacher who founded The RRPH with *Relix* publisher Peter Shapiro, shares some of her favorite gifts for this holiday season.

1

1) Drum Set for Kids

The new series of Family Bowl Trains at Brooklyn Bowl with Questlove is such a hit with our families and this Pocket Kit, developed by Ludwig and Questlove, is just right for your little ones.

The Pocket Kit for Kids
thepocketkit.com

2) Ear Protection For Our Littlest Rock Stars

We often see new parents at RRPH shows at Brooklyn Bowl with babies snuggled in carriers. Afternoon family shows are a great way for parents to see live music without having to worry about getting a babysitter. At RRPH, all of our shows turn the volume down for our kids, but we like this extra protection for our littlest fans.

Banz Infant Earmuffs
usa.babybanz.com

3) Finding Their New Favorite Instrument

Melissa and Doug's Band-in-a-Box is great gift for toddlers starting to explore music. The triangle [in the Clap! Clang! Tap! set] is a big hit in our family and gives the opportunity to teach shapes as the family plays along with our favorite songs.

Band-in-a-Box
melissaanddoug.com

Books, Books, Books

Before starting The Rock and Roll Playhouse, I spent years teaching elementary school. I always include books in my gift-giving to kids and families.

4) This series of books by Bob Marley's daughter Cedella Marley, based on her father's songs, is one of my absolute favorites.

chroniclebooks.com

5) Jack White's recent collaboration with illustrator Elinor Blake has turned The White Stripes' "We're Going to Be Friends" into a children's book. We can't wait to get our hands on this book and send it to kids and teachers everywhere as a holiday gift. Seeing kids listening to the lyrics of The White Stripes during circle time makes us smile.

thirdmanstore.com

6) Guitars for Children

One of my favorite moments during a RRPH show is when the musicians encourage the kids to take out their "air guitars" and start strumming as the musicians count down and get ready for the ultimate rock-and-roll-jump.

For our little rock stars:
hape.com
For our bigger rock stars:
loogguitars.com

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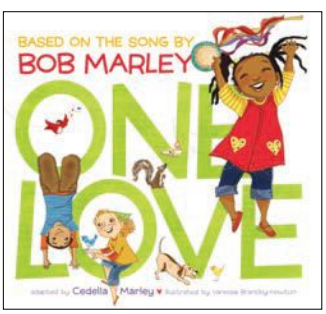

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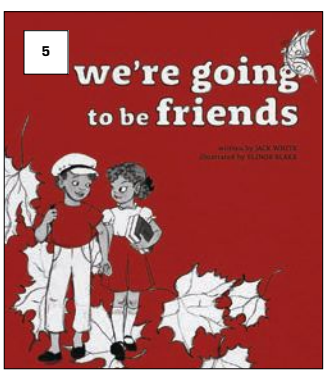


SAVE THE LAST DANCE FOR ME

A year after Sharon Jones' tragic passing, the mighty Dap-Kings honor their late singer with a fitting curtain call that's still 100 percent soul. *By* **JEFF TAMARKIN**

SHARON JONES refused to put much thought into retirement. Even as The Dap-Kings frontwoman reached age 60 and battled pancreatic cancer, the powerhouse soul singer never lost her exuberance and drive. Up until the time when it simply became impossible to carry on—she passed away on Nov. 18, 2016—Jones had only one way to get through the pain and sickness: Keep looking forward, keep singing. The title of Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings' Grammy-nominated 2014 album was *Give the People What They Want*, and that's exactly what she and her band intended to do.

"She had this will to sing, to connect to people," says Gabe "Bosco Mann" Roth, who serves as The Dap-Kings' bassist, producer, bandleader and chief songwriter. (He's also the co-founder of Daptone Records, the group's Brooklyn-based label.) "Vocally, she got stronger and stronger her whole life, even the last few months. We were always completely blown away by that. Physically, she was a strong person. I would not want to get into a boxing match with Sharon Jones. But, mostly, it was emotionally intense."

That intensity permeates *Soul of a Woman*, the seventh studio album by the singer and her longtime band, whose final lineup consisted of Roth, guitarists Joey Crispiano and Binky Griptite, drummer Homer Steinweiss, tenor saxophonist and Daptone co-founder Neal Sugarman, baritone saxophonist and Robert Walter's 20th Congress vet Cochemea "Cheme" Gastelum, percussionist Fernando "Bugaloo" Velez and trumpeter Dave Guy, who also plays with The Roots as part of *The Tonight Show*'s house band.

Released almost exactly a year after Jones' death, *Soul of a Woman*, which features all eight Dap-Kings and a slew of extended Daptone family members, is the final curtain call that the singer never wanted to take. But, when recording commenced, there wasn't a sense among Jones and the band that it might be their last release.

"It was never like we sat down and said, 'Let's make our last album,'" says Roth. "We didn't wait until the last minute and say, 'Well, Sharon, you're gonna die, so let's record.' That's just what we do—when we're out on the road, we're always working on the next record. If you just wait until you're done touring behind a record and then start recording, you'll put out a record every five years. It wasn't that intense [in the studio]—when the band was hanging out, it was always fun and relaxed."

"Even though she was sick, we all thought she could beat anything," says Gastelum. "We thought, 'OK, she's gonna kick its ass and then we'll get back on the road.' That's certainly what she thought. We were never grim. She was a fighter, through and through. We didn't really have it in mind that things were changing. Everyone was excited to make a new record and we all worked together on it with Sharon. We wanted to finish it and get it out there. Everyone was writing, and we had been playing a couple of the tunes on the road. That was really the vibe—to make the best record we could."

The band members all learned of Jones' illness shortly after she'd experienced pains in her back and side. "Then her eyes started looking yellow," Roth explains, noting that Jones went to the doctor soon after and was diagnosed with cancer. "It was shocking to all of us. Sharon had been with us for a long time and we were really close; we were family."

"It was heartbreaking," adds Gastelum. "I didn't really want to accept it. But she actually got stronger during the last few years of touring, and she was singing differently from night to night, really stretching out in ways I hadn't heard before."

"Standing in front of an audience, she would kind of explode; it was electric," adds Roth. "She was singing so beautifully. Not just loud—even the ballads, the tender stuff—she had such control and there was so much emotional content to everything she was doing. And so much rhythm—she had such amazing rhythm! She would bring these songs to life and really push the band."

* * *

SHARON JONES' DEATH MARKED the end of a remarkable, albeit late-blooming career: Although she'd sung all her life, Jones' ascent as a star of the soul revival movement didn't begin until 1996, when at age 40, she connected with Roth.

Born Sharon Lafaye Jones on May 4, 1956, in Augusta, Ga., she lived in North Augusta, S.C., before moving to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn as a young child. Like so many other R&B greats, she began singing publicly in church and later found work as a background singer and as part of wedding bands, while earning her living as a corrections officer at the notorious Rikers Island prison and as an armored car guard with Wells Fargo. Jones was singing on a session with R&B artist Lee Fields when Roth and his friend, musician and graffiti artist Phillip Lehman, heard her.

Longish story short, the Brooklyn-based entrepreneurs launched another label, Desco Records; then, after forming The Dap-Kings, Roth and Sugarman started Daptone in 2001. The following year, *Dap Dippin' with Sharon Jones and The Dap-Kings* became the first full-length release from Daptone, as well as Jones' debut. The LP received mostly positive reviews, and critics praised the band's loving faithfulness to the tenets and style of '60s/early-'70s soul music. Despite playing in front of musicians sometimes half her age, and from widely different backgrounds, Jones made sure her Dap-Kings felt like a family. Her band was even present, keeping her company and playing music by her bed, when she passed away in Cooperstown, N.Y., in the fall of 2016, just 10 days after the presidential election that troubled her so much.

With each successive album—and, especially, as word of the band's sweaty, ecstatic, festival-ready live shows spread—Sharon Jones & The

"I don't think I'll ever be as high as I was standing behind her onstage," Roth says of his connection with Jones. "She was made of something else."

Jacob Blickenstaff

Dap-Kings' audience grew exponentially. They released *Naturally* in 2005, followed by *100 Days, 100 Nights* (2007), *I Learned the Hard Way* (2010), *Give the People What They Want* (2014) and *It's a Holiday Soul Party* (2015). There was a long string of singles—the original medium for distributing soul music—but eventually, sold-out venues and five-star reviews became the norm.

Having famous fans led to even more opportunities—Prince joined the band onstage at a Paris show in 2011 and British DJ/producer Mark Ronson employed The Dap-Kings in 2006 for Amy Winehouse's second release, *Back to Black*. "I just couldn't believe that these guys in Brooklyn were getting this sound," Ronson told MTV News back in 2007. "It sounded like the records I loved." The Dap-Kings also backed Winehouse on her maiden U.S. tour.

Unlike Winehouse, Jones didn't have a "look." In her own words, she was "too fat, too black, too short and too old," and not in the least bit eccentric or flashy. What she possessed was *that* singular voice, stage presence and indomitable spirit. She put everything she had into every performance and every song, and she was still at the top of her game when she learned that she had cancer.

"Everybody's first concern was Sharon's health and getting her to feel better," says Roth. "But at the same time, some of the guys got hit in the pocket right away—you're living one month to the next and, all of a sudden, your calendar is clean and you can't pay your rent. I think for Sharon, that was the biggest concern. [She thought she'd] have surgery, go into remission and get right back on the road. The band was pretty adamant, telling her: 'Don't do it for us.' A lot of times, you felt like she just wanted to take care of the guys. But it was also very clear that she was only totally happy when she was onstage."

* * *

THAT FIRE AND VITALITY, STILL present in 2013 following her diagnosis and through her first round of treatment, was captured in documentary film director Barbara Kopple's 2015 release, *Miss Sharon Jones!* And that same energy is pervasive in *Soul of a Woman*. Its 11 tracks reflect the sheer pleasure that Jones found in her music, as well as the band's range as songwriters and players.

> "Even though she was sick, we all thought she could beat anything. We thought, 'OK, she's gonna kick its ass and then we'll get back on the road.'"
>
> **COCHEMEA GASTELUM**

"Creatively, it ended up being a really nice collaboration," says Roth, who produced the album using an analog 8-track tape machine rather than modern digital equipment. "A lot of people miss the point of it. People get hung up on the technology and all that stuff—tape, to my ears, sounds nicer. But tape forces your hand in a way that pushes you in the studio. Everything has to be figured out when the band's performing. You have to get the arrangement right, and they have to play it right and balance it right. I feel that it's better doing that with musicians in the studio than at home in your underwear on your computer."

It's nearly impossible to pinpoint *Soul of a Woman*'s highlights, but surely Jones' sole composition, the gospel album-closer "Call on God," is one of them. Written by the singer before The Dap-Kings existed, the track includes EL Fields' Gospel Wonders, the choir from the Universal Church of God in Queens where Jones first tested out her considerable pipes.

"For a long time, Sharon wanted to make a gospel album," says Roth. "We'd talk about what songs she wanted to do. It was kind of crushing that we weren't able to do it. 'Call on God' was actually recorded at an earlier session and put on the shelf because we were planning on using it for this gospel album that we never finished. After her memorial service, we went over to Daptone and recorded the choir behind her. She really would have wanted that. Those were the people she did that song for. They put on their headphones and they were able to sing with Sharon one more time. It was pretty emotional."

With Jones' passing, as well as the recent death of Daptone star Charles Bradley, The Dap-Kings are facing a difficult question: What now?

"We're musicians; we want to play music," says Roth, who, along with his bandmates, participated in the SuperJam at Arizona's inaugural Lost Lake Festival this fall. "We have a sound that we've cultivated for 20 years. It's not something that we want to put in the closet or throw out. But at the same time, we're very conscious that Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings without Sharon Jones isn't the same band. We'd love to do some kind of collaboration but, in my gut, I know we're never going to have that same feeling again. I would hate to try to re-create that with somebody else. I don't think I'll ever be as high as I was standing behind her onstage. She was made of something else. It's not going to happen."

"We all love each other and love playing together," adds Gastelum. "We're a family, so when the opportunities come up, if they're the right thing, we'd love to come together and play. But we're excited about this record and everyone is really proud of it. I'm just grateful that the music's out there, and that something we worked hard on together can be out in the world.

"It still doesn't seem real that she's gone; it still feels kind of fresh," he adds after a pause. "She was 100 percent soul."

PILOT SEASON

The ongoing story of *Relix*'s beer project with Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater Brewery

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

In our October/November issue, I shared an account of my early days as a homebrewer and described how Relix *has come to partner with String Cheese Incident keyboardist Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater Brewery on a collaborative beer. I also tracked the initial stages of the process as we made our way to Crosby Hop Farm in Woodburn, Ore. to select the hops that we would use. Our story now continues in early November, as Kyle and I make our way to SweetWater's Atlanta home base to brew the pilot batch.*

KYLE AND I ARRIVED AT SweetWater shortly after 9 a.m., reconnecting with head brewer Nick Nock and "Minister of Propaganda" Steve Farace, who had initiated our Oregon sojourn. Nick had prepped SweetWater's five-barrel brewhouse for this initial go-round. A brewhouse is a unit that consists of a mash tun (the vessel where crushed grains are converted into sugars) and a brew kettle (where this liquid, called wort, is then boiled and combined with hops).

After we added our barley, wheat flakes and malt, we had well over an hour for the mashing process to yield our sweet wort before we transferred it to the brew kettle (with some *vorlauf* action along the way, just to drop some jargon and sound pro—this is the process of recirculation to remove any large grain particles and facilitate wort clarity).

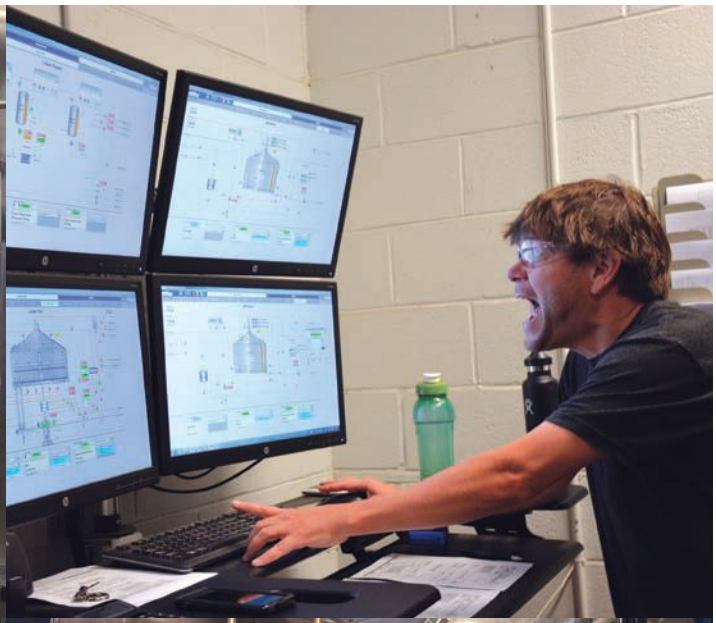
While all those enzymes were reacting with the starches (brewing is both art and science after all), we had time to make the rounds inside the facility. We saw the various tanks (including our beer's future home, the Dank Tank), leading up to the massive 400-barrel tanks—there are 31 gallons to a barrel—which are operated through a multi-screen computer interface. Then, we watched the bottling operation and the process by which kegs are refilled (after they are steamed and cleaned "to get off the guacamole," Nick suggested). Kyle even pulled a beer off the bottling line for his own *Laverne & Shirley* moment. (Watch the opening theme on YouTube if this reference eludes you—I brook no opinion as to whether Kyle is Laverne or Shirley.) We were also on hand for the daily sampling process in the SweetWater lab, where they taste everything that's heading out (and a few brews still in process) to ensure that the beer is consistent and worthy of being shared with the world (a.k.a. "true to brand"). Finally, Nick Burgoyne joined us over at the Woodlands where we sampled some barrel-aged beers. All told, if you have a chance to tour SweetWater, I heartily recommend it.

* * *

WHILE WE WERE IN THE Woodlands, I asked Kyle to reflect on his many years as a homebrewer and comment on what originally sent him down that path, which he has continued to explore while creating new music with SCI and his solo band. (*Ed Note*: Stay tuned for Kyle's new album *50*, which will be released on March 2, the day he turns 50.)

"My early homebrew days were due to my brother," he says. "Anything he did was super cool—he listened to the Grateful Dead first and then I listened to the Dead—and he was into homebrewing, which I thought was cool. I really enjoyed two parts of it. I enjoyed the process of creating something out of four ingredients—putting something together and having something completely different come out the other end. And it was also fun to have brother time and create something together. So that was an early part of it—the passion of brewing and also the passion of community and companionship. That community and companionship is also something I associate with beer in general."

Continued on page 79



Dean Budnick and Kyle Hollingsworth cleaning the spent grain from the mash tun; Kyle at mission control monitoring the 400 barrel tank; Kyle and Dean add hops to the brew kettle; Kyle pours a 420; Nick Nock gets grabby on the bottling line; SweetWater variety packs offer bonus art action (clockwise from top left)

Businessmen: Steve Colmus, J. Roddy Walston, Billy Gordon, Logan Davis (l-r)

THE MIDDLE-CLASS

GOLDEN TICKET

J. Roddy Walston and the Business passed their barista test with flying colors—and now they're determined to make their new album more than the soundtrack to a packed party.

By **MIKE AYERS**

J. RODDY Walston is having a pinch-me moment. Before playing a show packed with reps from his prestigious record label, ATO, and fans who know all the words to his songs, the 30-something singer/guitarist/pianist is sitting at the hip Brooklyn restaurant Café Colette, ordering the octopus and watermelon salad off the menu. Sure, he'd always hoped that, after years of barnstorming clubs, his titular group J. Roddy Walston and the Business could one day pay the bills, headline a tour or even make it to a marquee stage at a major festival; but no aspiring musician ever dreams of being able to afford the octopus.

"I know it's cheesy," he says. "But I always think of that *Willy Wonka* movie. At the end, he was like, 'Do you know what happened to the boy who got everything he ever wanted? He lived happily ever after.'"

This may be Walston's reality now, but it's been a long time in the making. For years, there was a constant hustle—playing the bar circuit and slowly graduating to bigger venues in towns where they may have lapped up a few fans along the way. They spent a good portion of the last decade driving around from show to show in an old church van—a far cry from anything you'd see parked outside of a restaurant in Brooklyn serving octopus.

This night is more than a culmination of 16 years of

hard work. It's the start of a new era—two hours after getting the check, Walston and the Business take the stage at Brooklyn, N.Y.'s intimate Music Hall of Williamsburg, where they play a handful of new songs from their fourth studio album, *Destroyers of the Soft Life*. The 10-song collection finds the band maintaining their upbeat nature through pounding, Southern-rock drenched numbers intermingled with some of their most personal lyrics to date.

The fans are packed in and the band instantly showcases exactly why they've cultivated a devoted following over the years. Walston's a dynamic performer, going back and forth between hovering over a piano and moving out in front, commanding the crowd with just the microphone. At times, he bounces on each foot—left, right, left, right—like a boxer in the corner of a ring, readying himself for a fight. Walston has that look in his eye too—the eye of a tiger that wants to conquer the show, the crowd, the song.

"When we finished making the last record, we were still in the position of, 'I wonder if anyone will ever really hear it,'" he says. "I felt bolder this time—more excited about making music—because I knew there would at least be a moment where some number of people, right off the bat, would hear this."

The band actually made a proper bucket list a few years ago. It wasn't anything extravagant or elaborate—a lot of it resembled what any band would want after a decade on the road, sleeping on beer-soaked couches and hustling to make rent money. And he always aspired for his group to pass a simple test: Would they be better off as baristas?

"The threshold was always someone who works at Starbucks," he says. "It was always like, being in a band requires everything and maybe not even getting paid. I remember the first time we broke even after playing in New York. We got paid a hundred bucks. We all celebrated that without thinking that it cost us $60 in gas and $40 in tolls to get here. What if we could be middle-class income people playing music?"

"I felt bolder this time—more excited about making music—because I knew there would at least be a moment where some number of people, right off the bat, would hear this," Walston says of his new LP.

It's a fair question.

So is *Destroyers of the Soft Life* that middle-class golden ticket?

* * *

WALSTON WAS BORN AND RAISED in the small town of Cleveland, Tenn. Learning about music from his grandmother, he became drenched in gospel, soul and country at an early age, and started his first band at 15. But, unlike a lot of kids who start bands when they're teens, he wasn't doing it to get laid or divert his attention from schoolwork.

"I had a few serious conversations with my friends, where it's like, 'Are you in or are you out?'" he recalls. "And I just wanted to be that guy that has the moment where a few kids like me, or that one guy that I think is cool likes our band. And I wanted to write music with the intention that everyone should like my music."

The Business started a few years later in 2002 when Walston was 19. The musicians relocated to Baltimore in 2004 and self-released their first album *Hail Mega Boys* in 2007, followed by their self-titled label debut album three years later. Zach Westphal, the band's original bassist, had dropped out during the album's recording, and consequently, just before their tour began,

> "People expect the absolute worst from us. So when they find out we are really nice and responsible, they are like, 'You are a superhero! You said, thank you! That's crazy!'"
>
> **J. RODDY WALSTON**

bassist Logan Davis joined Walston, guitarist Billy Gordon and drummer Steve Colmus, solidifying the current lineup.

Walston left Baltimore for Richmond, Va., near Harrisonburg, where Davis was already living, in 2010. After they wrapped up the tour cycle behind 2013's *Essential Tremors*, Walston became a father and, at the same time, needed to take a break from songwriting. The momentum they felt coming off that tour—the first true one where they passed the barista test—was in jeopardy. So they started doing what any music junkies with a bit of cash might do and looked for space to build a studio.

The frontman spent weeks driving around Richmond, scouting out locations where he and Davis could get to work. They finally settled on a building that used to be a grenade factory. A "country boy" with hoarding tendencies was running the place and turned it over to them, not realizing that Walston and Davis would gut it.

It was an undertaking that ended up being useful creatively, though they didn't know it at the time. The group spent days working with hammers and buzzsaws, listening to music in ways they hadn't in years.

"I was sick of everything on my playlist, sick of everything on my phone, sick of my record collection," Walston says of that time. "It was like co-workers sharing music while you're working—normal people listening to music, rather than like, 'I'm a musician and I need to go study how to get over this hump of songwriting.'"

After the studio was completed in early 2016, Walston began writing the material that would make up *Destroyers of the Soft Life*, and his band started the initial tracking process around that same time. In early 2017, after a large chunk of the album was done, they headed to Seattle to put the finishing touches on it with producer Phil Ek, known for his work with The Shins, Fleet Foxes and Built to Spill.

For many of the songs, they honed the music first, often creating demos for different versions and writing fake lyrics as placeholders, so they could get the right melody, phrasing and rhythmic timing down.

When it did come time to write the lyrics, Walston says, perhaps more than ever, the subjects started to shift this time around. "I was a little less interested in word collages and more following the path on a song," he says. "A little less abstract painting and a little more photo-realist."

That new approach drives tracks like "You Know Me Better," when Walston proclaims, "You know me better than I know myself/ I don't have to think/ I think it's just as well," or the co-dependent anthem "Bad Habits," when he sings, "So bring the mortgage money my dear/ We'll have some thousand-dollar nights/ And smoke some Marlboro Lights, cause cancer ain't no worse than fear."

"There was never a time when I was like, 'This song isn't about anything, and I just like the way these words sound together,'" he says. "I don't want to say we made a political record, but we were making a record during a very weird time. I'm in your face, and these are the words I'm saying. You can hear them and process them if you want to or not."

* * *

A J. RODDY WALSTON AND THE Business show often feels like a party. There isn't really a sense of calm. Their energy flows—it's in your face—and, if you ever run into the band offstage, it would be easy to assume that the Business like to continue that vibe all the time. They have *that* look—like they want to jump off a roof into a pool, à la *Almost Famous*. Except that "I wanna rock-and-roll all night and party every day" period is now behind them.

"We're grateful that people pay money to come to our shows," says Davis. "And I would hope that we would never be that band with a headline that says, 'They had to cancel their shows because they can't get their shit together.'"

"People expect the absolute worst from us," adds Walston. "So when they find out we are really nice and responsible, they are like, 'You are a superhero! You said thank you! That's crazy!'"

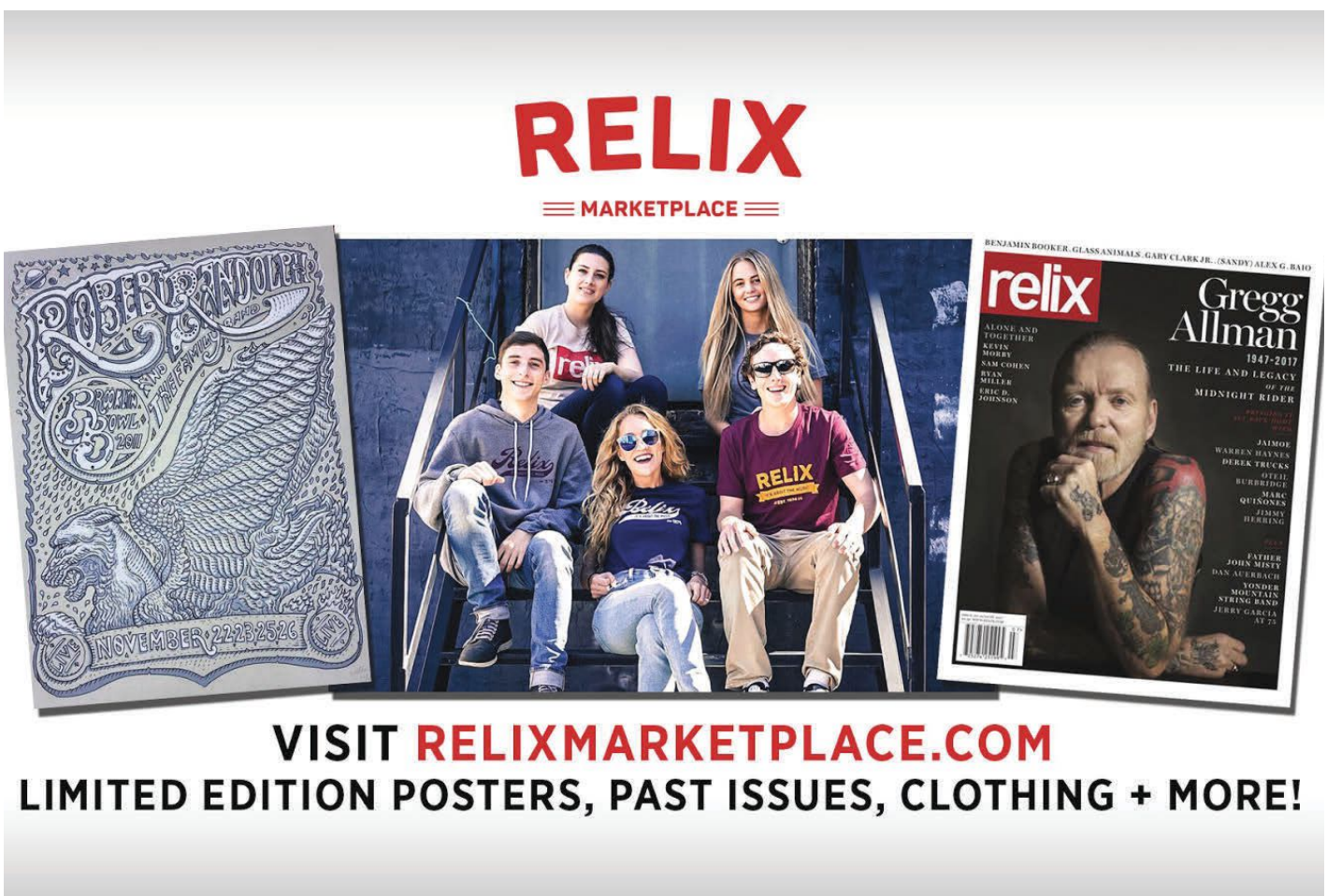
Walston has often struggled with the band's future during the past 16 years. It's become his coming-of-age story, in many ways. There were nights he was forced to take a good hard look at his life, his lack of success and how to string it all together—a fight-or-flight response based off hopes and piano riffs.

"There's been plenty of moments where I was like, 'Is it just the band name? Do we just look like idiots? Why isn't it working?'" he says.

At this point in the interview, the octopus is long gone. He's picking through the chilled watermelon in almost a reflexive way.

There are still a few items left on his super-short current bucket list ("Europe, Australia"), and he shifts the conversation into something more existential. "In an ideal world, music that I think is great wouldn't mean that it's popular. There's a lot of bands that have music, and I don't know what the fault is, but I don't know if anyone's heard it."

He pauses to think about it for a second, before coming up with his band's current hashtagable social-media status: "I think we made a great rock record."



Indie-rock survivors: Rob Pope, Britt Daniel, Jim Eno, Alex Fischel (l-r)

FURTHER ON

DOWN THE ROAD

Over 20 years after they helped usher in the modern indie-rock movement, Spoon have returned home to Matador older, wiser and without curbing their enthusiasm. *By* **MATT INMAN**

Britt Daniel is at home in Austin, Texas, attempting to relax during a short respite in the midst of a busy summer on the road. The Spoon frontman and songwriter is as affable in conversation as one would expect from his rollicking onstage and in-studio persona. "Three whole days," he jokes of his brief vacation before surveying the near quarter-century of success and occasional missteps since the Austin-based outfit formed in the Texas capitol.

Spoon have long since climbed to the upper echelon of indie-rock royalty and, in many ways, are survivors of the blogger boom that dominated critics' lists a decade ago. They are also the rare breed of band that found widespread fame in the early-to-mid-aughts and have continued to put out quality and boundary-pushing material, including this year's *Hot Thoughts*—an engaging collection that ranges from catchy hooks to ethereal soundscapes—which finds the band continuing the growth they displayed with 2014's critically acclaimed *They Want My Soul*. In somewhat of a homecoming move for the group, another indie stalwart, Matador Records, the first label to house Spoon's music when they released their debut *Telephono* in 1996, put out their new album.

Their renewed partnership with Matador, with whom they've remained friends over the two ensuing decades, isn't the result of warm and fuzzy memories. In fact, the early era of Spoon held some stretches that the band might rather forget entirely. Just a few years after their promising introductory record, the members found themselves at a point where they weren't sure they would ever record another note of music.

"We were fabulously unsuccessful for the first couple of records," admits Daniel. "Something had to change."

"We felt incredibly lucky that we had this chance to be on one of our favorite labels," adds drummer Jim Eno who, along with Daniel, has been the band's only other constant member since its inception. "We also knew that we were going to do this as long as we can—we just didn't know how long that would be. We figured we would keep trying and, if people liked our music, that would be great. Unfortunately, in those early years, no one really listened to us."

Spoon onstage at San Francisco's Outside Lands in 2014

Spoon quickly followed their debut album with an EP, *Soft Effects*, which honed in on a bit more of the band's unique flavor of indie-rock. But finding a voice doesn't necessarily translate to finding an audience, and though Spoon soon signed to a major label, their career was nearly derailed before it could even gain steam. Simply put, their first record with Elektra, 1998's *A Series of Sneaks*, was a commercial flop, at least as far as their new partners were concerned. The label quickly dropped the band, following the departure of their A&R advocate Ron Laffitte—a wholly disheartening incident that the band took as abandonment and to which they later responded with a two-sided single featuring the punnily titled tracks "The Agony of Laffitte" and "Laffitte Don't Fail Me Now."

"I was pretty bummed out when we left Matador and made a record for this major label," Daniel says. "And we were not doing it naively—we knew all of the pitfalls, or at least a lot of them, that could arise. We were pretty wary of that situation, and somehow it turned out worse than we could have pictured. We really felt like we'd been run through the ringer."

The band even started questioning their future. "We didn't know if anyone would want to put out our music again," Eno admits.

"I definitely thought that it was not only possible, but *likely*, that we wouldn't be able to keep making records," Daniel says. "For some reason, we didn't quit and start over with new people, or with a new band name. If we had been smart, that's probably what we would have done."

* * *

IF THE BAND'S ULTIMATE GOAL was fame and fortune, then they would have opted for a clean slate, maybe even a wildly different sound. Luckily for their current fans, Daniel's aspirations were considerably more modest, at least at the outset.

"I knew that I'd still be able to do shows in Austin and that I would always find a way to do music because I love it," he explains "That's why we kept going. Because even though business-wise, it made sense to quit, there were always the shows in Austin."

Those local performances kept Daniel writing music, which has always been the backbone of the whole Spoon endeavor, something that Eno recognized early on. "I kept hearing the songs that Britt was writing, and I was just like, 'We need to keep moving on this. We need to get things recorded. This is fun.'" So the band continued, and so did the albums.

"Nobody wanted to hear them, but we kept pushing anyway," Daniel adds with a laugh. "I never lost the desire to do it; it was just a matter of, 'It looks like we're not going to be able to do it.'" Enter Merge Records, who put out the band's next album, *Girls Can Tell*, in 2001. The album outsold their previous two efforts combined and kicked off a highly successful relationship that lasted throughout the decade and produced four more LPs, solidifying Spoon's place near the top during the hipster era in the process.

Along with the change in label, the music began to solidify into the sparse, swaggering style that Spoon is known for. Daniel's songwriting matured, too, taking on a more personal air. "I felt like, if we were going to keep going, I had to keep [evolving] because, so far, this wasn't working," he says. "To start, it was art for art's sake and lyrics for lyrics' sake—the vibe of *Pink Flag* by Wire. I loved that approach, but, eventually, we grew out of it."

Girls Can Tell had enough of an autobiographical bent to include his then-recent struggles with Elektra, says Daniel. "That's where I started opening up lyrically, and owning up to the fact that I had feelings. Before that, it was all about art. With some of the songs on that record, I was writing about that experience—what it's like to feel heartbroken, to be a bit washed up at a tender age.

"I don't feel like the same songwriter who made the first record," he continues. "It's weird to look back on a document like that, to see that it has the same name and to feel so different. I guess that's part of what some people find so cool about our catalog. For me, personally, it's hard to relate to that record. It does feel like a different guy made it."

Spoon's studio presence advanced quickly in a similar fashion to their writing. While they made their early recordings to *feel* like their live show—partly because that's all they knew how to do—their acceptance of the studio as another instrument, which also came around *Girls Can Tell*, helped further their career and lead to today's process of creating records.

"I would say, around maybe 2000, we started using the studio more," Eno says. "Britt has a background in audio and sound effects—he worked at a video-game company right out of school—so he was that sort of little tweaker when it comes to sounds. You start hearing that on songs like 'Paper Tiger' [off 2002's *Kill the Moonlight*]. That's a crazy song that has a wild backing track, a lot of reverse things."

Four albums after "Paper Tiger," Spoon recorded the track "Inside Out" for *They Want My Soul*. The single and final song the band recorded for the album—as well as one of their best compositions to date—ended up paving the way for the extended, experimental nature of *Hot Thoughts*. The album contains more exploratory tracks, like the longest song Spoon has put on record to date, the slinky mid-album cut "Pink Up." (The record's experimental twist, not surprisingly, also has a lot to do with its producer, longtime Flaming Lips collaborator Dave Fridmann.)

The track—which boasts a vibraphone-heavy ostinato, various instruments that float in and out of focus, and even some back-masked vocals from Daniel—is the ideological descendant of "Paper Tiger" and, Eno predicts, it denotes a direction that the band plans to explore further in the future.

"We've never done anything like that before," Daniel says of the track. "So when I happened on that idea and got it halfway done, I thought, 'If we can finish this one, and we can get it feeling as good as I need each song to feel, then that will be a new step for the band.' So I jumped on it."

> "The Beatles couldn't make *Revolver* again, even if they wanted to. That's part of the way you prove your mettle."
> **BRITT DANIEL**

* * *

SPOON ARE STILL LOOKING TO take new steps on the eve of their 25th anniversary. Even after experiencing those nearly

devastating early failures, Daniel knows that there isn't any real movement for a band except for going forward.

"The Beatles couldn't make *Revolver* again, even if they wanted to," he muses. "That's part of the way you prove your mettle. Every band and every songwriter says they want to do something different, but you've got to truly go do something new. You also have to know when those new directions are good and when they're crap. I could go make a hip-hop song tomorrow, but it probably wouldn't be very good."

Daniel has written enough quality songs to know what works for his band, though some outside encouragement always helps. The songwriter remembers the first time he really noticed that Spoon were making a name for themselves, back in 2002.

"After *Kill the Moonlight* had been out for a few months, I remember that Christmas, going back home and feeling like something was actually happening that I had never experienced before," he says. "We were selling out shows. I remember opening up a magazine and seeing [producer and composer] Dave Sardy cite that his favorite bands were Radiohead, Beck and Spoon, and I was like, 'What the fuck?' Those were my favorite bands! So something must've been going right."

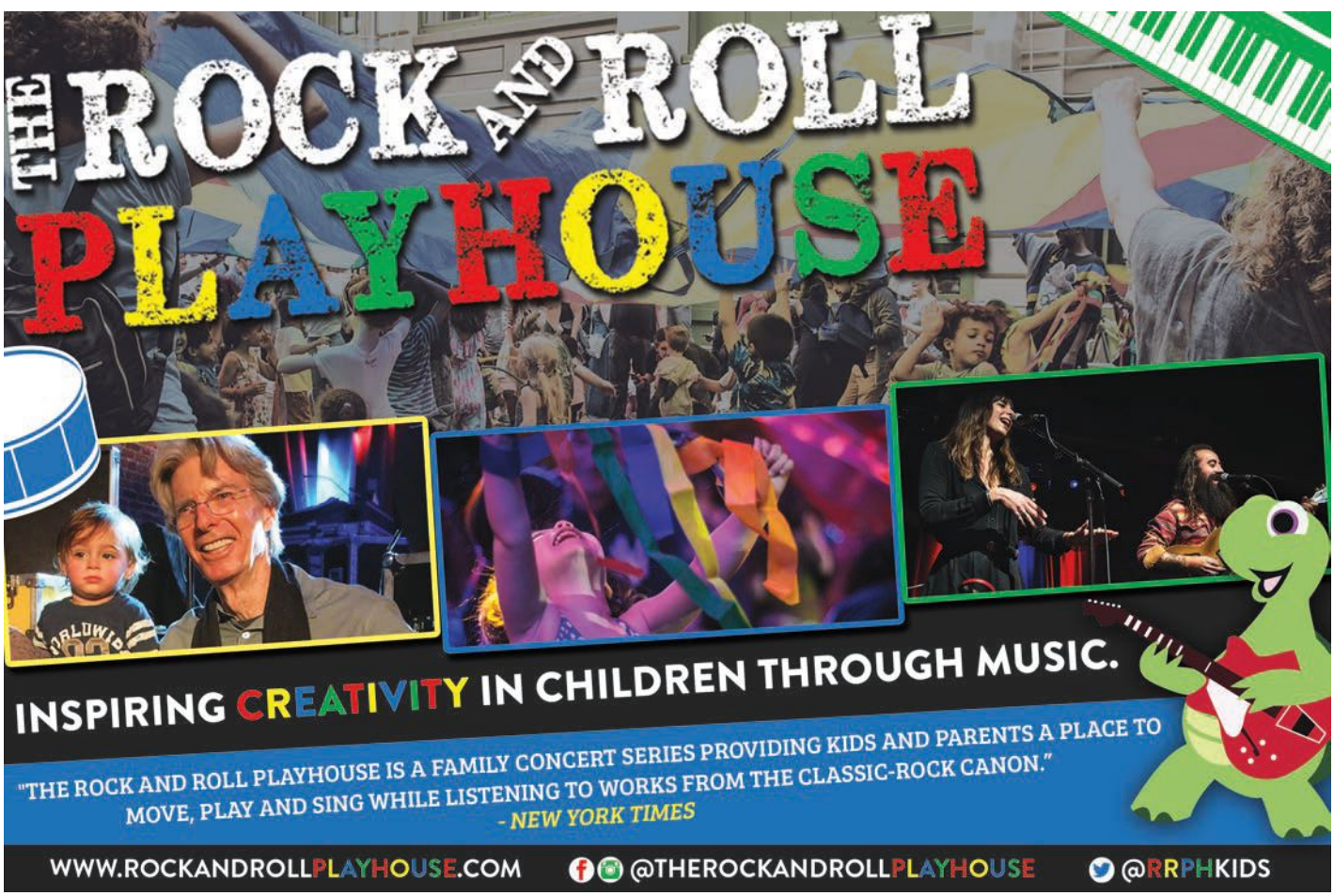
"I think that's what made that a really exciting time," Eno agrees. "You could see things building, and more people coming to our shows. It was pretty rewarding."

Daniel and Eno still share a palpable sense of excitement all these years later, and it's not hard to see that their energy is exactly what keeps their music fresh. A Spoon song always sounds like a Spoon song but, nine albums later, there isn't any staleness to the newer tracks. And, Eno notes, that's partly why the band decided to team up with their old partners at Matador this time around: not to recapture that youthful feeling, but because the label felt the same way they did about their music.

"We're friends with those guys, and it's funny because all of the same people who run the company are all still there," Eno says. "So it's crazy to get back into meetings with them like we did 20 years ago. We're fans of that label still, and Matador could not have been more excited about this record. They showed an enthusiasm that was basically unprecedented with any other industry people we talked to. When you have that enthusiasm, it doesn't matter—obviously, the business stuff has to work out but you can't manufacture enthusiasm."

"Full circle" may seem like an appropriate phrase for Spoon's return to their first label, but the band's direction has never felt circular, so perhaps it's more apt to call it another meeting along a continuing road—a path that has stretched far longer than the group could have ever dreamed.

"I certainly didn't think more than a few years ahead," Daniel says of Spoon's early days. "I knew that making records was a thing I really wanted to do because it seemed like the best job. The thing that made life worth living was other people's great records, so I wanted to make some, too. I had this general vibe that *that* was what I wanted to do with my life, but I didn't think too far down the road about what that meant. Similarly, I don't know now, either. I finished a record last year, it came out this year and I've got some shows to do; I'm not sure what happens after that."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MIND MISCHIEF

On the heels of Phish's historic 13-night residency at Madison Square Garden, Mike Gordon searches for a new sonic language with his surprisingly indie-rock leaning solo LP.

By **ROB MITCHUM**

MIKE Gordon's soundcheck is running late. Three weeks into their tour, his band is about to play their fourth show in four nights in four different cities—not counting a session at *The Onion*'s offices earlier that day—and they're going on just a few hours of sleep. Though the quintet's warm-up is creeping into their dinner hour, singer/guitarist Scott Murawski insists they do one more thing: the "non-varying exercise."

For the next 10 minutes, Gordon's group—which also includes keyboardist Robert Walter, drummer John Morgan Kimock and percussionist Craig Myers—vibe around a simple three-note melody and a loping rhythm. At one point, Gordon lays down on the stage, head on a speaker, to focus on the vibrato of Walter's keyboards. After a brief tempo upshift and a goof on the theme song from *The Munsters*, Gordon's band is in shape for that night's performance at Chicago's Metro.

Later, over a very large superfood-filled Caesar salad, Gordon explains the philosophy behind the exercise, which he adapted from his brief spell rehearsing with Dead & Company, and how it's informing his playing with both his own band and Phish.

"It's hard to explain how powerful it is," Gordon says. "When the jamming isn't good, when it feels like we're noodling, it's not powerful. It's not playing itself—there's a lot of over-thinking, over-playing, over-rhythm, over-melody, over-everything. When we do the non-varying exercise for 5 or 10 minutes, it forces us to accept the beauty of repetition; that's the simple part. Then the next part is: You hear subtlety, the nuances between the notes and the rhythm, the internal rhythms."

The emphasis on minimalism carries over to the tour's aesthetic—a stark stage set of in-ear monitors, wireless guitars and gear hidden behind black screens gives the show a look of almost post-punk severity—at least, until the custom guitars light up neon as the jams peak.

It's also easily detectable in Gordon's newest album, *OGOGO*, a collection of tightly arranged and brief but subtly layered and thickly grooved songs. Despite being a member of the world's most popular jamband, Gordon is finding new inspiration in an unlikely genre: indie-rock.

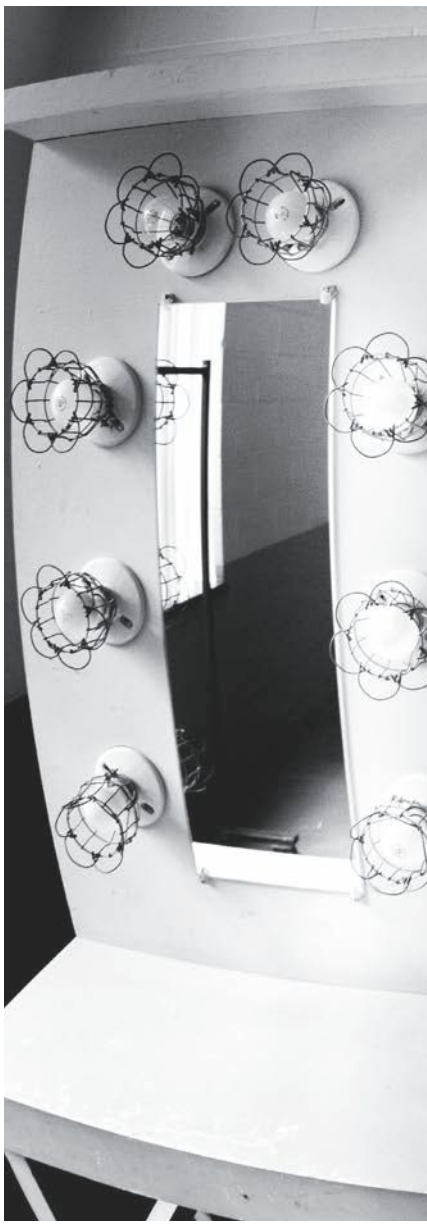
OGOGO was helmed by producer of the moment, Shawn Everett, who has also worked on recent albums by The War on Drugs, Grizzly Bear and Broken Social Scene.

On this tour, Gordon's band introduced a new cover of "Mind Mischief" by Australian psych-rockers Tame Impala, joining similarly new-vintage takes on material by Aerosmith, Here We Go Magic and The Flaming Lips. While Gordon once thought of indie rock as "an excuse to play a little bit out of tune," lately, he's been listening to acts such as LCD Soundsystem, tUnE-yArDs and Mac DeMarco.

"I was just ready for new sounds, especially in my own band, where it just feels like we're not going to be as good as the bands we've been influenced by our whole lives—to start to hear new sounds both coming in my ears and coming in the band is just so refreshing," he says, having recently stressed that he consciously avoided imitating Phish and his longtime heroes, the Grateful Dead and The Meters, on his new LP. "So that which used to seem, in some ways, a little distasteful to me, now just seems fun and experimental, like uncharted territory."

With those influences in mind, Gordon came to the *OGOGO* session with the goal of creating "even more air and space between the notes, where it could be even funkier, and even sparser," he explains, adding that "when you do hear the notes and the hits and everything, it's more warped. So it's trying to be more catchy and more experimental at the same time."

Gordon found the perfect accomplice in Everett, who came at the recommendation of recent Phish producer Bob Ezrin. Impressed by Everett's balance of groove, space and texture on Alabama Shakes' *Sound & Color* and Warpaint's *Heads Up,* Gordon landed time with him at Q Division Studios in Somerville, Mass. There, the producer challenged Gordon and his touring band to use different instruments and effects to create a sound that varied from their live approach.

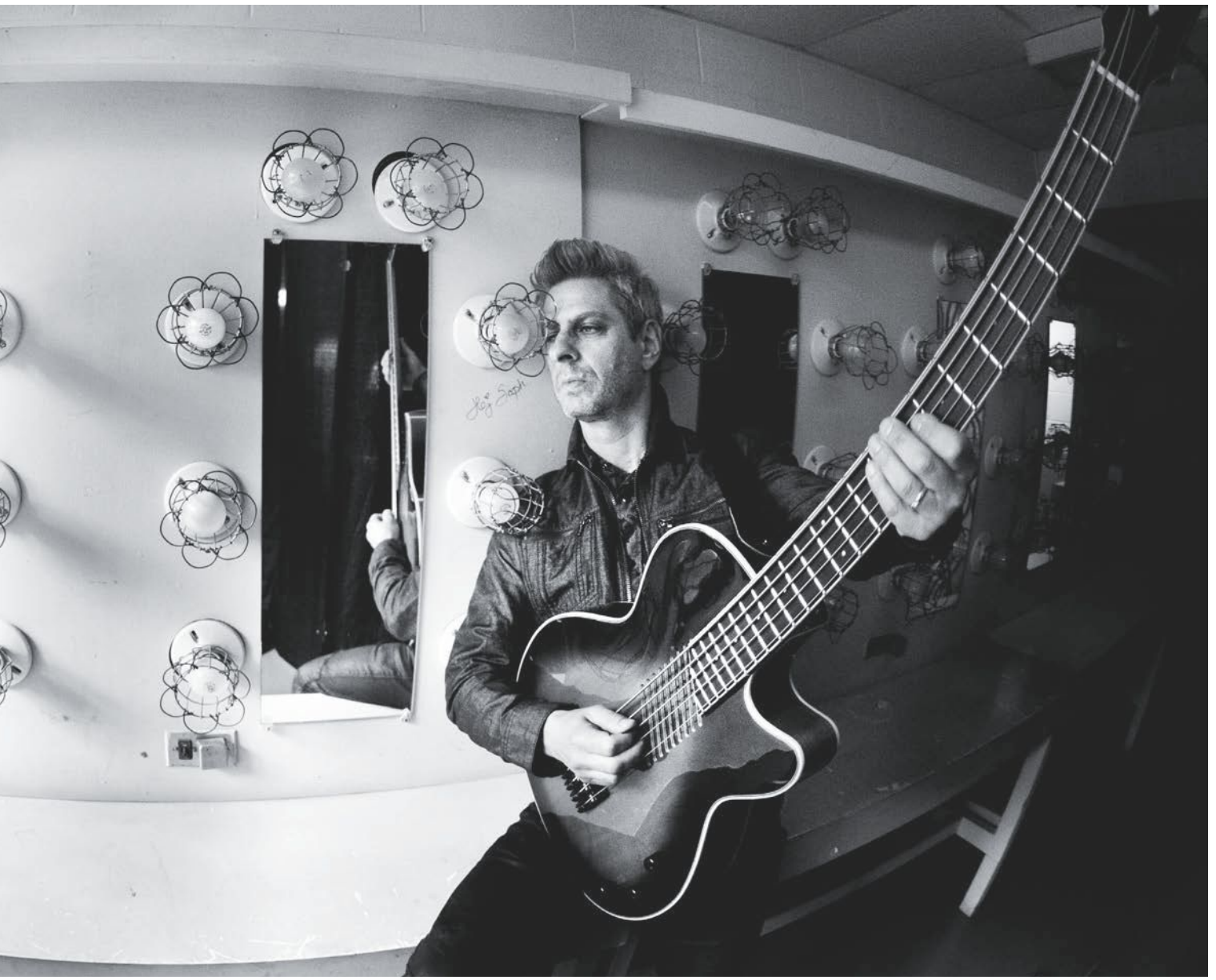


Rene Huemer

"Every single instrument and the vocals were recorded in ways I'd never seen before," Gordon says. "Shawn is so experimental and so nice and, even in the digital world, he's lightning-fast and wants to serve the song, so it's kind of like a dream come true."

* * *

AT SOUNDCHECK, IT'S CLEAR that Gordon and his band are still figuring out how to best translate the studio intricacies heard on the LP to the stage. Reading off notes from his phone about the previous night's show, Gordon asks Kimock for a bigger finish to "Pendulum," frequently used as a set-closer on the



tour. For a cover of Robert Palmer's "Looking for Clues," Gordon encourages Walter and Myers to add some more flair to the verses. "Let's keep the mesmerizing qualities, but avoid letting it just kind of lay there," he says.

For fans used to Gordon's stoic stage persona with Phish, it's particularly satisfying to watch him in bandleader mode: crafting the setlist, orchestrating the jams and chatting between songs. With the current lineup of the band now in its third year together, there's also a natural communication among them that dispels any sense that this is just a side-project.

"Part of being a bandleader is pulling together the right people and trusting their creative instincts enough to relinquish some of that control, and I think this is happening more as the band develops," Murawski suggests. "Relinquishing some of that control allows the band members to express themselves creatively, which is crucial for the happiness of everyone involved. This band really is the sum of all its parts, and Mike's leadership has encouraged that."

"It's pretty cool to tour an album with the band that played on it," Gordon says. "I think there's extra camaraderie, extra spirit, that just comes from that full-circle experience. We're all involved in the writing process, the recording, the touring. So we feel like we're in it together, and that's pretty special."

Gordon put together his original long-running solo group in 2008 near the end of Phish's "breakup" period. After years of sit-ins and short-term side-projects, he took his first real breather from the road and started looking for a new group of improvisers. With the exception of his steady collaborator Murawski—Gordon grew up taping his band, Max Creek—he purposely zoned in on relatively unknown musicians, including Myers (who was then best known as a member of Rubblebucket), keyboardist Tom Cleary and drummer Todd Isler. He continued to tour under his name between Phish commitments through 2014, before rethinking his solo project and reemerging with his current quintet in 2015. Slowly, especially given Kimock and Walter's stature in the jamband world, they've coalesced into a true band.

The setlist for Chicago's concert reflected an enthusiasm for *OGOGO*—nine of the show's 16 songs are from the album, including the Murawski-sung opener "Victim 3D" and the night's lone encore, "Steps." They also offer the very eerie, strange, as-yet-unrecorded

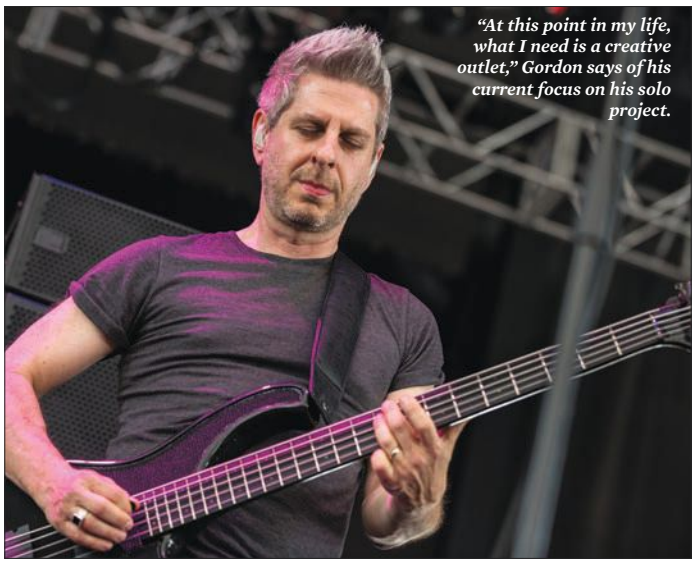
song "Trapezoidal Sunshine" (a verse of which Gordon sings crooner-style into a handheld mic) and the *Big Boat* tune "Waking Up Dead," which carries a savage edge that Phish versions never reach. The improvisation stretches the terse focus of the recorded takes to double their original length, but without significant deviation from their underlying groove.

"It's good to sink our teeth deeply into less material and get better at it, rather than try to do too much," Gordon says. "[The new songs] are all evolving; they evolve in subtle ways, but subtle ways make a huge difference, especially since a lot of them are based on these simple patterns."

This tour's intimate settings have proven to be an effective incubator. At the 1,150-capacity Metro, which Phish last played 25 years ago, fans casually greet Gordon as he enters the venue through the front door and there isn't a rail separating the front row from the stage. Inside the entrance, Gordon finds his mother, artist Marjorie Minkin, who's in town for a family bar mitzvah, and they catch up by the coat check before ducking backstage. (Longtime fans may remember that Gordon's mother used to paint Phish's onstage backdrops and is the subject of the bassist's early original "Minkin.") When the "Reel"—the donut-shaped percussion pad contraption that allows fans to jam along with the band—surfs its way over the crowd during "Normal Phoebe," it conjures up visions of the "Big Ball Jam" from Phish's long-ago club days.

Gordon says he feels invigorated by the close surroundings, telling a story of how he wandered away from Colorado's Dick's Sporting Goods Park one afternoon this fall to admire the posters at a nearby tiny venue.

"These bands just seem like they're on the cutting edge—this kind of striving feeling that comes with it, you don't know what's going to happen next—we haven't been a band for as long and we're still evolving," he says. "There's something about the freshness of that in a little place, that's a discovery period."



"At this point in my life, what I need is a creative outlet," Gordon says of his current focus on his solo project.

* * *

ACROSS THE STREET FROM Metro is another venue that Gordon recently played: Wrigley Field, the site of two massive Phish shows in the summer of 2016. And, in a couple of months, Phish will return to the legendary stage of Madison Square Garden, bringing their total 2017 plays at the arena to a staggering 17. With most of Gordon's attention focused on his solo work these days, his feelings about Phish are a little detached, yet warm.

"What I love about [Phish] is that I can still just go for a ride. There's someone to write most of the songs, there's someone to make the decisions and there's someone to do the solos, and I don't really want to be doing the solos because I like being the bass player," Gordon says. "I love going on that ride still—the chemistry gets deeper and bigger and better, we're still growing and we still love each other."

When the conversation shifts to this summer's successful Baker's Dozen run, the bassist is quick to give credit for the concept to Trey Anastasio ("he worked on this for months and he had a gigantic chart") and says he was mostly focused on his bass sound—adding more vibration, less treble and aiming for "a body thing rather than a mental thing."

But when talking about his favorite moments—"Scents and Subtle Sounds" and "No Men in No Man's Land" from the run's "Lemon" night, which topped his list, the "Jam-Filled" night not so much—it's clear that some of the same minimalist goals he's exploring with his own band were at play for Phish as well.

"There was a lot this summer about 'less is more' in terms of how the simplest little melody in a big jam can go so far," Gordon says. "To an outsider, it might sound kind of trite, but the actual melody isn't the point; the point is, as with the non-varying exercise, that this simplifying is allowing it to be easy for the music to play itself."

When things felt especially good with Phish this summer, Gordon said he would immediately text Murawski and the other members of his band any takeaways he thought would translate. Even with Phish, his mind keeps drifting back to his solo work.

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>
> MIKE GORDON

"I could write a book based on only Mike's texts!" Murawski says. "The texts I got from him during the Baker's Dozen were mostly inspirations that he felt during the shows. In some cases, they had to do with some of the jams that they did where he felt that the music was 'playing the band,' how they got to that point and how we could take steps to stop thinking when we're jamming to let the muse drive us. In other cases, he would text about the effect certain Phish songs were having on the crowd and why. This somewhat influenced the new covers that we brought in for the tour."

"The Phish guys are really open and encouraging of each other," Gordon says. "They'll tell me to bring songs of any kind—weird, normal—they're very open. But at the end of the day, if I want to write a lot of songs and sing a lot of songs, then I have to have my own band. At this point in my life, what I need is a creative outlet."

What comes next through that portal is an open question. Gordon says he has ideas for 10 more albums, and a deep reserve of material that wasn't recorded for *OGOGO*. He's started "dabbling" again with Leo Kottke, the fingerpicking guitarist who made two records with Gordon in the 2000s. He wants to start making movies again, and plans to write a screenplay for the first time. And, Gordon seems happiest when he has a variety of different potential projects on the burner.

"I have so many ideas about how I would like to make different kinds of albums that would be radically different from one to the next," Gordon says. "Some would be all about the flow and less about the song; some would be more about the song and less about the flow. I just get excited because when you dabble in something, you see what the possibilities are."

Andrew Blackstein

SUMMONING RHONDA LEE

Nicole Atkins sobers up and finds her inner crooner.

By **HOLLY GLEASON**

NICOLE ATKINS CAN'T FIND THE coffee filters. She's looked in all the cupboards and on the shelves of the cream-colored, sunlight-filled East Nashville kitchen where she resides. She'd arrived home far later than planned from Alaska after wrapping up a string of shows. She's already missed a doctor's appointment, and *really* needs that coffee.

"I don't *do* a lot of things," she explains. "But the things I do—like music and coffee—I'll *do* it until I *die!*"

She laughs, makes a mock-crisis/serious face. But a reality remains: She can't find the filters, and she needs coffee. Finally, taking two paper towels, she folds them to fit the catch in her coffeemaker and gently scoops the ground beans in.

"Coffeeeeeeeeee...," she intones, invoking caffeine's healing powers. Then she rolls her eyes, making fun of her exhaustion. Even as she suggests these small dramas are really no drama at all, she demonstrates the cat-landing-on-its-feet grace that defines a career that's been hailed by *The New Yorker, The New York Times* and countless late-night TV shows.

With her copper hair caught back in a stubby ponytail, rectangular glasses, oversized shapeless sweater hanging down and vowels steeped in the squawk of the Jersey Shore, the lithe 39 year old could be just another grad student trying to pull it together. But the hanging rack of sequins and vintage clothes in the kitchen—"They're from my garage sale. No one came," she confesses—suggests a far flung career path through the major label grinder en route to carving her own space beyond genres.

Is it alternative? Adult? Vintage chanteuse? Retro-soul? Rock? Noir-cocktail jazz? Psychedelic pop? Whatever it's called, she sings it with a depth of emotion that rivals Adele, Sade, and even the deceased Dusty Springfield, Dinah Washington, Amy Winehouse and Dap Queen Sharon Jones.

Goodnight Rhonda Lee, Atkins' latest, mines the emotional landscapes of bottoming out and seeking sobriety. With the minimal "A Night of Serious Drinking," spaghetti-western undertow of the title track, serious soul of "Listen Up," Randy Newman-esque funky torque of "Brokedown Luck" and Bobbie Gentry by way of Burt Bacharach feel of "I Love Living Here (Even When I Don't)," *GRL* measures a heart soaked in gin and trys to dry it out.

Recorded at Fort Worth, Texas' Niles City Sound with Leon Bridges producers/former White Denim members Josh Block and Austin Jenkins, the song cycle traces Atkins' own battle with the bottle, steeping it in the Jersey girl's deep musicality and with the help of a band filled with ace players like Robert Ellis.

"When he heard the demos Austin was like, 'This is Roy Orbison and Aretha Franklin having a party in London in the '60s,'" she recalls over coffee on the front porch. "It swings. One of the influences was Frank Sinatra's *Ring-a-Ding-Ding!* Timeless stuff... I wanted to make a record that if I died tomorrow, I'd have made a record of what I do best: '50s songs are what I record. The music I do onstage is more '60s and '70s soul, but there's other stuff, too."

The musicality keeps what could be mountains of melodrama in perspective. While the unfiltered Nicole Atkins writes about being tortured by the bottles at the bar in "Colors," and gently pulls her drunken protagonist alter ego somewhere to minimize the damage, the music is what makes *Goodnight* so special.

It's not surprising. Atkins is a musical magnet. She's produced Bash & Pop/former Replacement Tommy Stinson, co-written with Bad Seed/NYC punk provocateur Jim Sclavunos *and* Chris Isaak. Seemingly able to use her voice to sing *anything*, she once scatted questions to DeeDee Bridgewater at a University of North Carolina lecture. As a teenager growing up in New Jersey, she jammed onstage with moe. and has served as an auxiliary member of Joe Russo's Almost Dead. She's particularly close with JRAD guitarist Scott Metzger and has used his instrumental trio WOLF! as her backing band. It is these layers that make things interesting.

"It was so cool, working with these really schooled musicians," she marvels. "I could say, 'Do that four times, then go to this note...' and they could do it. There was a *Nashville Scene* article that really bummed me out, suggesting the band did it. Truth is, I might have all those talented guys around me, but I coached them for what I wanted. Just because I don't play these instruments, it doesn't mean I can't arrange these songs! I sing people the parts, and say things; with 'Sleepwalking,' I said, 'Let's go *Love Boat*. Is that cheesy?' And they were all, 'No.' [The musicians] knew *exactly*. Sometimes it's the vibe as much as the note."

* * *

ATKINS IS A TALKER. SHE REGALES everyone who will listen with tales of growing up in Jersey and the cover bands she's played in, learning to go into New York and finding the anti-folk scene, running a business painting murals after college, chasing the night in Brooklyn before it was hip, working at SiriusXM, growing up with her golf-loving father "Dutch" and feeling boxed in by the tags her hometown hangs on people. She explains, half-ruefully, "Nicole is the singer."

All those things conspired to take a wildly talented girl who loves a good time and create a problem. Not one to moralize, she confesses that by sliding down and crawling back up the slippery slope of sobriety over and over again, she fed people's skepticism and her own sense of struggle.

She recalls talking to her sister about it. "I remember saying, 'Courtney, you don't understand. If there's beer in the refrigerator, then it's all I can

"Two days before I had that final relapse, I called Jim Sclavunos and said, 'I can't do music anymore. It's breaking my heart too much.' He was at a photo shoot with Nick Cave, and he's like, 'Nicole wants to quit.' Nick says, 'Tell her to get over it," Atkins says of a turning point during her long road to sobriety.

think about,' and her saying, 'That doesn't make any sense.'"

In time, Atkins figured things out. "People have no reason to understand. You know, they think, 'If you wanna stop, why don't you just stop?' But there was a clarity in those relapses. Coming out of [an episode] and going, 'Well, I didn't die, and I'm not in a hospital.'"

And there was the sinkhole. Laughing, she recalls, "I fell into a ten foot sinkhole outside the Baymont Inn and Suites in Knoxville. I couldn't crawl out, and my keyboard player tried to give me a hand, and that didn't work. He had to jump in and boost me.

"Something shifted. I remember thinking, 'I am in my 30s. When is this teen angst gonna end?' But the fact I didn't die in a hole? That somehow took my anxiety away."

Passing through the kitchen into her office/study/workroom—full of books, odd bits of art to stoke her imagination and an ever-ready laptop—there's a strong scent of "creativity lives here." More than mere Bohemian pretension, the former mural painter curates for maximum inspiration.

Atkins and her husband, Ryan McHugh, made the decision to relocate to East Nashville after they married. Hailing from Scotland, McHugh often felt like an outsider in Jersey, and the change of scenery was a means for them to make friends together. (His employer, musician J.D. McPherson, was also making the move to Music City.)

The first year was rugged but eventually she found a tribe of fellow creatives. "Nashville was very brown, and the streets have a lot of broken glass. In Jersey, I could go to the boardwalk and the ocean; here I was landlocked," she says of her acclimation to the city.

She marvels, "As soon as I got out of that hole, I've never had so much help. One of my best friends from home said, 'Whoa, that's heavy. Hope you sue.' My friends here? A huge outpouring of care: soup, rides and just company. It was awesome."

Tumbling through all the notions in her mind, she thinks about how she arrived at this point, the falling down—literally and metaphorically—and *Goodnight Rhonda Lee*. Laughing about the folly of it, she sits at her desk and savors the irony.

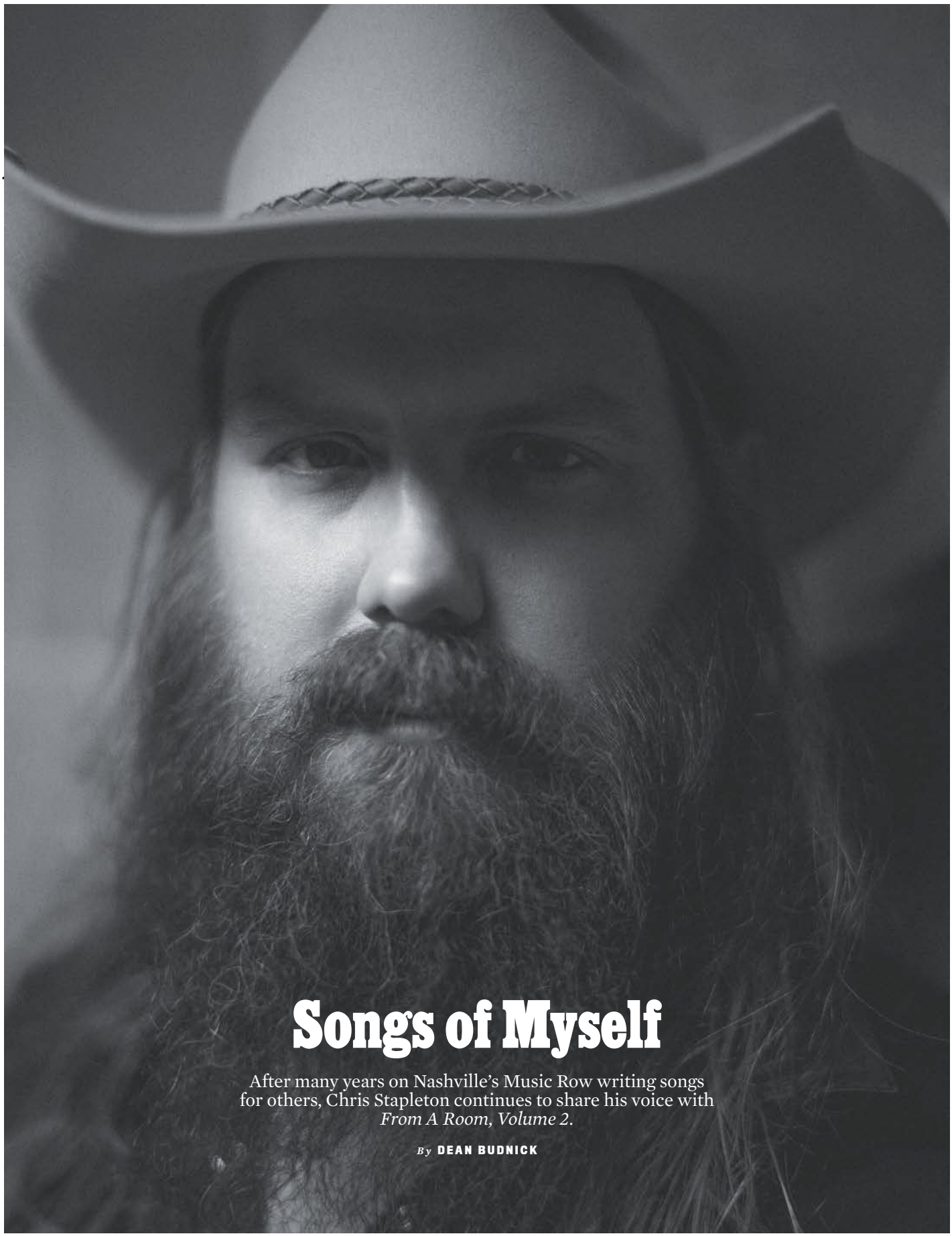
"I was in a deep depression, and remember thinking, 'How do I take this shitty situation and turn it into something beautiful? How do you take the good, bad, and ugly, and use it?'

"Two days before I had that final relapse, I called Jim Sclavunos and said, 'I can't do music anymore. It's breaking my heart too much.' He was at a photo shoot with Nick Cave, and he's like, 'Nicole wants to quit.' Nick says, 'Tell her to get over it.'"

Eventually she did. After this year's Bonnaroo, Atkins marveled that she was out until 6 a.m. with an open bar and never twinged for a drink. Eight months sober at this writing, she says, "This is the first time I felt 'the shift.' It actually *does* happen."

Slated to open a series of shows for Umphrey's McGee, Atkins recently completed dates with McPherson and just recorded a classic country duet of Guns N' Roses' "November Rain" with fellow East Nashville writer/provocateur Aaron Lee Tasjan. She's writing with everyone from Isaak to My Morning Jacket's Carl Broemel to Taylor Swift's guitar player. Creating, creating, creating.

"Fuck fame," she says. "I just want this to be sustainable. When you [make music] not loaded, you have a hundred ideas a minute; you have thought behind them and you know what to do. If I fuck up, it's okay. I just want to make music."



Songs of Myself

After many years on Nashville's Music Row writing songs for others, Chris Stapleton continues to share his voice with *From A Room, Volume 2*.

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

Becky Fluke

CHRIS STAPLETON STILL RETAINS fond memories of performing "Midnight Train to Memphis," the rousing, rowdy seventh track on his new album *From A Room: Volume 2*, during his initial trip to Bonnaroo.

The singer/guitarist, who is currently hailed as one of country's biggest crossover sensations, received a spirited reaction from the crowd, many of whom had never seen him perform before. In fact, very few individuals outside the Nashville songwriting circles who held him in the highest esteem were all that familiar with Stapleton as he played with his group that Saturday afternoon at Bonnaroo.

That's because Stapleton did not deliver a soulful reading of "Midnight Train" with his touring group on the main stage in 2016, but with his bluegrass band The SteelDrivers at The Other Tent in 2009.

The fact that Stapleton—whose *From A Room: Volume 1*, which hit No. 1 on the Billboard Country Albums charts this past May, as a follow-up to the similarly chart-topping *Traveller*—chose to cut a new version of "Midnight Train," featuring a snarling electric guitar rather than a sprightly banjo lead, is a testament to the depth of his catalog, the nature of his friendships and his expansive view of the musical constellations.

The decision to name two albums after Nashville's historic RCA Studio A—where Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Dolly Parton all recorded—affirms his regard for tradition. However, he is not a dogged traditionalist. Instead, he's willing to seek out inspiration from wherever he finds it, whether that's through the sounds of Ray Charles and Otis Redding or exchanges with Tom Petty and Justin Timberlake.

His perception of Bonnaroo does not comport with that of an insular country artist. As he looks back on The SteelDrivers' 2009 set in The Other Tent, he acknowledges: "Bonnaroo is one of those things that everybody wants to check off as a box. It's one of those things that can elevate you as a performer. There are several festivals like that—Lollapalooza, Coachella and some of these big name places—where if you can just get your name on the bill, it becomes this thing where even the people that aren't there can look at it and go, 'Oh, they're playing Bonnaroo!' It kind of legitimizes you in certain ways. So it was a big deal for us to get to play that."

Stapleton's words do not sound like those of an archetypal country artist. Yet his vocals do, with their graceful yet gravelly timbre. On November 8, the Country Music Association affirmed this assessment by naming him Male Vocalist of the Year for the third consecutive time, while also selecting *From A Room: Volume 1* as Album of the Year, the same honor given to *Traveller* in 2015.

To see him perform with his full touring act, which includes his wife Morgane Hayes as well as bassist J.T. Cure, who previously joined Stapleton in his garage band The Jompson Brothers—the project that followed The SteelDrivers—one can understand why he also has received multiple CMA nominations as Entertainer of the Year. However, Stapleton and company deliver such a robust, commanding live show that he remains free of any genre constraints.

For Stapleton, it all flows from the song. Since the composition itself is paramount—without consideration of radio format or other classifications—his work has been recorded by a diverse collection of artists from Adele to Kenny Chesney to Joss Stone to George Strait. His songwriting efforts have also informed his personal pursuits, guiding him to various projects over the years.

The story of how this all came about reflects equal parts steadfastness and serendipity.

* * *

STAPLETON GREW UP IN rural Kentucky, where his initial exposure to music came through the radio in his father's car. There, he absorbed the work of outlaw country artists such as Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard, as well as Otis Redding and classic R&B. "There are some people who might feel that all of those don't quite fit together," he says, "but I connected with all of them. It just felt right to me."

Stapleton took up the guitar and began writing songs in his teens but he had no expectations of pursuing a career in music. If anything, he hoped to be a professional football player. He was a high-school running back of some renown. A local newspaper clipping during summer practice of his senior year touts his prowess and notes that he is getting "looks from Princeton and Army." While Stapleton made recruiting trips to both schools, the high-school valedictorian ultimately decided to enter Vanderbilt to pursue an engineering degree. Still, he acknowledges that he held out hope of making the Vanderbilt team.

"I'd gone to a camp there and really liked the coaching staff, so I wanted to walk on," he says. "But when you're 18, you think you're better at things than you actually are. On my best day, I was six-foot, 210 and ran a 4.8 second 40-yard dash. To play Division I SEC, you've got guys that are defensive ends who are 6'7" and running 4.6s that weigh 270. I wasn't that kind of material. I could've maybe played D2 or D3 and been average. If I had the skill and the ability, I would have probably played football instead of music. I loved football that much. I just didn't have that ability."

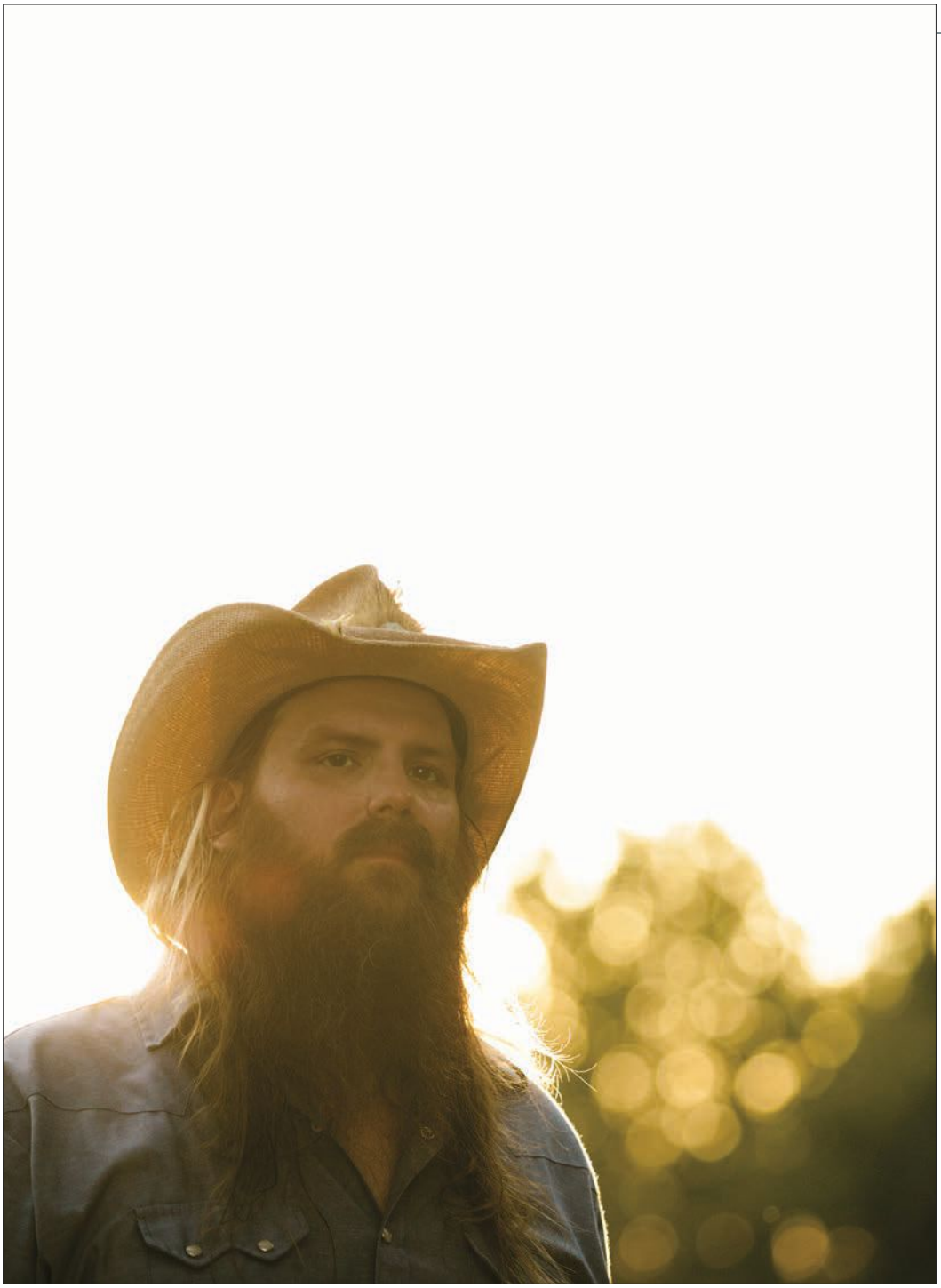
As it turned out, he also didn't have the affinity to be an engineer. Although it was his father's profession and various family members held math-based degrees, he looks back and explains: "I just picked something. In retrospect, it wasn't really me." So Stapleton never completed his program at Vanderbilt, and this is where his story takes a fortuitous turn.

"I finished the semester I was in—I didn't stop in the middle of something. But I decided to chill out for a minute and work some different jobs—I sold cars, drove an ice truck, worked at pizza joints—just whatever to pay the bills. I moved into a nearly commune-type place in Morehead, Ky. It was a house, but it was very dilapidated and got condemned not long after I moved out. My bills were $80 a month, so I could play music and get better at it, while working other jobs to figure out what it was I wanted to do.

"Nobody I knew was a professional musician or songwriter. It was not something that ever crossed my mind, until I ran into a guy named Steve Leslie through a mutual friend. He was a salaried songwriter, which I didn't know existed. As fortune would have it—now that I'm in the music business, I know how rare this is—he said to my friend, 'If you know anybody that writes songs, I'd love to help them out.' So my friend gave me his number and, being green and unknowing of what the process was, I called him up and said, 'Hey, I write songs.'"

Leslie invited Stapleton to send him some material and, a few weeks later, after assessing five songs, suggested they attempt to write together.

Many years later, Stapleton looks back with some astonishment at what ensued. "I went back and forth for a couple of months and met



Andy Barron

some people and then I moved to Nashville. Four days later, I had a publishing deal. And I've been working as a professional songwriter, musician's demo singer—whatever you want to call it—ever since. That's my story. It's the luckiest story in the world when you say it out loud. But that really is my story."

Stapleton arrived in 2001 and, through a steady work ethic, soon found success as a professional songwriter at Sea Gayle Music Publishing, a company founded two years earlier by Music Row veterans Brad Paisley, Chris DuBois and Frank Rogers. Prior to the release of *Traveller* in 2015, Stapleton amassed a catalog of over 1,000 songs and his work yielded more than 170 album cuts, including chart-toppers for Kenny Chesney ("Never Wanted Nothing More"), Darius Rucker ("Come Back Song"), George Strait ("Love's Gonna Make It Alright") and Luke Bryan ("Drink a Beer").

It was also during this time that Adele covered "If It Hadn't Been for Love," which appeared on The SteelDrivers' 2008 self-titled debut. That record, and the band itself, was another direct product of Stapleton's songwriting. One of his earliest collaborators was Mike Henderson. In 2003, their "Drinkin' Dark Whiskey" became the lead track on Gary Allan's platinum-selling *See If I Care* album, and they later recorded their own version with The SteelDrivers.

"I had written a bunch of songs with Mike, who is a wonderful poet and songwriter, and brilliant musician," Stapleton recalls. "We had a weekly standing appointment, and we both had an affinity for bluegrass. After we'd written a bunch of songs together, Mike said, 'Hey man, do you want to play some bluegrass, just for fun?' At this point, I'd only been songwriting for three or four years but I had settled into being a songwriter. That was my space in the world. So when Mike brought up playing again, I thought it sounded like fun. We were going to get together once a week, find a VFW gig and play Flatt & Scruggs songs—old standards and things like that. He called the rest of the guys—Richard Bailey, Mike Fleming, Tammy Rogers—and we got together at his house and started jamming. Then we started pulling out songs that we'd written and, slowly but surely, we had a catalog of things to play other than covering Flatt & Scruggs."

The ensemble record two albums before Stapleton departed in 2010; he was touring with them when Morgane became pregnant with their first son. She was a fellow country songwriter and performer he met in 2003. For a time, they worked for neighboring publishing companies. (Her credits include Carrie Underwood's "Don't Forget to Remember Me," which peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart.) "While she was pregnant, she was also singing background vocals with Lee Ann Womack," Stapleton now explains. "It became a very difficult dynamic, where I'd be gone and she'd be home—or she would be on the road and I'd be home. It's like when somebody works a night shift and their spouse works a day shift."

So he returned to his own day shift at Sea Gayle. However, Stapleton soon found another outlet for his live performance expression a bit closer to home—he started playing in his garage. There, he ditched his acoustic guitar,

plugged in and began exploring '70s rock with a new quartet, The Jompson Brothers. "It just came from hanging out with friends, writing rock songs and jamming out on riffs," he says. "We'd have stacks of beers left out in the garage—we were literally a garage band. Eventually, we decided we'd try and start playing out in the clubs because it felt like a natural thing to do. We enjoyed ourselves, but we were so independent that nobody knew who we were."

That soon changed—The Jompson Brothers played a limited number of live dates, as its members' schedules permitted, sharing bills with such acts as North Mississippi Allstars, J. Roddy Walston and the Business and The Dirty Guv'nahs. In 2010, *No Depression* co-founder Grant Alden wrote a piece on the group that echoed Jon Landau's 1974 anointing of Bruce Springsteen (albeit with Alden's tongue somewhat in cheek), which began: "I have seen the future of rock 'n' roll..." Others wrote pieces that referenced Gov't Mule and Drive-By Truckers.

The Mule comparison carried some significance to Stapleton, who affirms: "I respect Warren [Haynes] so much as a player, writer and touring musician. There are few guys that are as respected as he is among musicians." In October 2015, as a solo artist, Stapleton would later open a few dates on Haynes' Ashes & Dust tour. "One night, Warren got me up to play 'Desperados Waiting for a Train,' the Guy Clark song," he recounts. "That was one of the coolest moments for me because, several years before—one of the first times I ever played in an amphitheater—I played acoustic solo before Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers."

As for The Jompson Brothers, in 2010, the group released a self-titled album, full of brawny, exuberant tracks. *American Songwriter* likened them to Led Zeppelin and also cited their "riff-driven, fist-pumping sonic assault." The album included "Secret Weapon," a song that Jason Aldean began using as his walk-out music, disclosing, in a Radio.com interview, "It's just one of those songs that gets you fired up ready to go."

The Jompsons—whose efforts began to wane in early 2013—never approached country success, nor was that their intention. Instead, they were a natural compound of Stapleton's friendships, songwriting proclivity and a new element: his comfort with the electric guitar.

Stapleton, who is now the lone guitar player when he tours with his own group, made his live electric debut at, of all places, the Grand Ole Opry. About four years into his stint as a Nashville songwriter, Trent Willmon asked Stapleton to join him on background vocals for a gig at the Opry. Stapleton assented and, after Willmon learned that Stapleton had an electric guitar at home, he encouraged him to bring that as well.

"I wasn't really thinking about what I was committing to. I was thinking he was going to have me strumming some chords. But it turned out that I had to learn some bars and things," Stapleton says with a laugh. "I'd never played electric guitar on a stage before in my life, and wound up doing it on the Grand Ole Opry. So I started fooling around with the electric guitar and then the rock thing came up, and I bought a Jazzmaster at Corner Music in Nashville—not because I was looking for it, but because I just picked it up and liked it. I'd never thought about that guitar before—everybody had a Strat or a Tele or something like that. Then I had a 410 Bass [amp] that I used because that's what Mike Henderson used. I began hunting things, and I eventually got down to the rig that I use now, which is essentially Jazzmasters and early '60s Princetons."

For someone who "had never even really played a solo on guitar," Stapleton was a quick study. Years later, when it came to his solo band, the role ultimately fell to him. Just prior to the release of *Traveller*, he formed a group that included Cure and drummer Derek Mixon, along with pedal-steel player Steve Hinson and Jimmy Wallace on keys. However, a few weeks into their tour, both Hinson and Wallace bowed out. ("Travel was pretty rough in those days," Stapleton acknowledges.)

With a few gigs looming over the coming weekend, the trio came together on a Wednesday to see if they could make it work. They slogged it out that night and determined that Stapleton could carry the load on guitar. "It was uncomfortable for a minute—and still is sometimes—but I've at least sort of settled into what I'm capable of doing on the guitar, trying to find a way that's musical and serves the song."

> "When my booking agent first told me that [Tom Petty and his team] were thinking about having me out on the road, I didn't figure it was real. And in the world of things that I get to do—which seems increasingly surreal every day—that was right at the top of the list."
>
> CHRIS STAPLETON

Stapleton is characteristically modest about this, but it's worth noting that he did find himself trading licks alongside Bonnie Raitt and Gary Clark Jr. at the 2016 Grammys during a B.B. King tribute. (On the same night, he also took home awards for Best Country Album for *Traveller* and Best Country Solo Performance for the title track.)

Stapleton names B.B. as one of his influences, citing the triumvirate of Kings: Freddie, B.B and Albert. Beyond these blues icons, he points to Mike Henderson ("I try to steal as much of his stuff as I can") as well as former NRBQ guitarist Al Anderson ("Another good songwriting friend of mine, but also a great guitar player"). Then he names an oft-overlooked guitarist, whose work also holds deep meaning for him: Mike Campbell of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers.

Petty and his bandmates are entwined within Stapleton's musical DNA, as Petty's *Wildflowers* is "probably my favorite record of all time."

There was a moment in 2013, when Stapleton made a direct appeal to his hero. After Petty issued a remark that was slightly dismissive of contemporary country music, Stapleton posted "An Open Letter to Tom Petty." He wrote:

Dear Tom Petty,

I think it's safe to say most modern country artists, including me, would list you as an influence. Your recent comments lead me to believe you see room for improvement in modern country music. I, for one, would like to see you put you [sic] money where your mouth is in a tangible way. So, in the interest of making country music less "shitty" (your words), I suggest a collaboration. I'm extending an open invitation to you to write songs with me, produce recordings on or with me, or otherwise participate in whatever way you see fit in my little corner of music. In the event that you actually read this and are interested, look me up.

Sincerely,
Chris Stapleton

This past summer, Stapleton realized one of his few remaining career goals, when he opened three dates for Petty (a show at Wrigley Field in Chicago, followed by a pair at Milwaukee's Summerfest). Although the two musicians talked shop, Stapleton's missive from four years earlier never entered the conversation.

"I'm sure he didn't remember it or think anything about it at the time. The gist of it—some people may have taken it as me being defensive, but it wasn't that at all—it was, 'Hey, man, if you really like country music so much and you care about it, come

Chris Stapleton returns to Bonnaroo, June 11, 2016

Dean Budnick

participate and let's make it better.' I never got a response and I didn't expect one, but I felt it was worth saying. And also, I selfishly hoped that maybe Tom Petty would read it and go, 'Hey, man, let's do something.' Because why not? If you don't ask, the answer is always no."

Stapleton pauses and his voice catches, as he reflects on Petty's untimely passing in October. "When my booking agent first told me that they were thinking about having me out on the road, I didn't figure it was real. And in the world of things that I get to do—which seems increasingly surreal every day—that was right at the top of the list. It was very cool. The last thing he ever said to me was: 'I hope we get to do more of this.' And I left there thinking that we might. Like so many in the musical world and, of course, the guys in his band, I was so heartbroken to learn that he had passed. I cried about it. That was a hard day for me."

* * *

STAPLETON'S EMERGENCE AS A critically lauded performer and platinum-selling artist in his own right came about felicitously over lunch with a pal. Brian Wright had started his career in A&R at Universal at the same time that Stapleton had arrived in Nashville, receiving a promotion to vice president a few years later. "I thought we were just going to talk about the state of the world and catch up on life," Stapleton recalls. "When we got to the end of lunch, he looked over at me and said, 'Hey, why don't you come over and make a country record at Universal?' I didn't really have a response. I said, 'Well... OK, let me think about that.' At the time, I had no thoughts of doing anything other than continuing to play rock-and-roll and having a good time. So I told him: 'Let me go home and talk to my wife about it.' When I spoke with her about it, she said, 'Well, as long as you get to do what you want to do, I don't see why you wouldn't do it.'"

But the album he ended up making was never released. Shortly after completing it, Stapleton played the record for Luke Lewis, the head of Universal Nashville, who, in a story that is not altogether uncommon in the realm of major label life, stated that he would be leaving Universal the following week. "Normally, for a guy in my position—I was 35 or 36 at the time—that spells the end," Stapleton reflects. "Then Mike Dungan came in and listened and said, 'Well, I don't really hear what I'm wanting to hear out of this. Let me sit on it for a minute.'" Although Dungan wasn't enamored with the recording, he remained committed to the artist signed by his predecessor, rather than dropping Stapleton from the roster.

While initially frustrated, Stapleton eventually opted to push forward and make *Traveller* with producer Dave Cobb at Nashville's RCA Studio A. Stapleton turned to Cobb after hearing his work on Sturgill Simpson's *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music*. "There was a sound on there I had been chasing, but hadn't been able to achieve. I thought it was something long gone, that modern engineers didn't do it that way. But Dave somehow had the juju. He was a student of the history of engineering. If you name a Rolling Stones record, he could tell you the name of the microphone and preamp and all those other things that are on there—he's an encyclopedia of that stuff."

Stapleton and his core band (including a few guests such as Willie Nelson's harmonica player Mickey Raphael who would go on to gig with Stapleton) took a loose approach in the studio. Most of the record was tracked live without charts or overdubs of any sort. The result was by no means a traditional country record—it had something of a rough-hewn edge—but it was a pure expression of Stapleton's 15-year run in Nashville. After Stapleton's tenure in the community and all the work he had done for other artists over the years, he had plenty of folks rooting for him. *Traveller* soon earned plaudits for its authenticity and song craft, but it still remained to be seen how the public at large would respond.

Then on Nov. 4, 2015 Stapleton's career finally hit overdrive, thanks to Justin Timberlake and a sequence at the CMAs that Stapleton describes as "8 minutes that can change your life." There, he took the stage with Timberlake on acoustic guitar for a performance that began with *Traveller*'s "Tennessee Whiskey," followed by Timberlake's own "Drink You Away." Moments into the national broadcast, Chris Stapleton became an overnight sensation, 15 years in the making.

Stapleton had no inkling that the performance would yield this type of reaction; he just knew that "we were going to have fun out there." The two had become unexpected pals through another instance of happenstance a couple of years earlier. A mutual friend had pointed Timberlake to a Stapleton video on YouTube, which eventually led Timberlake's wife, actress Jessica Biel, to call and ask, "Hey, I'm always looking for things that Justin hasn't done yet. Would you come play his birthday party?'"

Stapleton pauses to chuckle as he reflects on the moment: "So I wound up being part of his birthday festivities one

Continued on page 78

REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

St. Vincent

ST. VINCENT

Masseduction LOMA VISTA

When NPR published "Turning the Tables: The 150 Greatest Albums Made By Women" over the summer, the list sparked a vibrant online discussion about the long-standing marginalization of women in popular music, as well as a predictably reactionary "rockist" response that questioned whether a list that sought to define a new female-centric canon was even necessary. (The burning retort for that contingent: What are you afraid of?) For whatever reason, **St. Vincent** (**Annie Clark**) didn't make NPR's roundup. That oversight will surely gain new traction when *Masseduction* is taken into account—it's a complex, multihued progression beyond her self-titled 2014 breakthrough, and not just because she recruited some stellar musicians to join her in the cause, such as vocalist **Jenny Lewis**, saxophonist **Kamasi Washington**, piano prodigy **Thomas Bartlett,** pedal-steel legend **Greg Leisz** and co-producer **Jack Antonoff** of Bleachers, fun. and Steel Train. Starting with the whimsical, hypnotic "Hang on Me," Clark folds herself completely into the narrative of the album; when she sings "I got this thing I keep thinkin'...the void is back and I'm blinkin'," she's knocking down walls, peeling back layers and closing the synthetic distance that was a feature, not a bug, of her last album. Electronic textures and beats—most palpable in the techno-fueled "Sugarboy" or the digitally granulated backdrop of "Fear the Future"—still play a prominent role in her music, but the sonic sorcery is just part of what makes *Masseduction* tick. Put simply, it's a writ-large personal statement that's as compelling as Prince's *Sign o' the Times* or Bowie's *Blackstar*. Of course, whether the self-appointed guardians of the rock canon can deal with that revelation is another story. ***Bill Murphy***

Van Morrison

Roll With the Punches

EXILE/CAROLINE

For all of the transcendent, meticulously crafted stream-of-consciousness vocal wanderings he has made over the years, and for all of his ethereal and profound, thinking-person's wordsmithing, **Van Morrison** doesn't always sound like he's having fun. But put him in a recording studio with some old, trusted friends and set him loose on a passel of blues, and the joy radiates. *Roll With the Punches* is the Morrison who kept it raw and loose in his days with Them, before *Astral Weeks* and *Moondance* and all the rest. Aided here by sympathetic minds of **Georgie Fame**, **Jeff Beck**, **Paul Jones**, **Jason Rebello** and **Chris Farlowe**, Morrison digs deep. His medley of T-Bone Walker's "Stormy Monday" and Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue"–segued seamlessly–is blues misery at its merriest, as the singer ruminates openly on his pain for our benefit, and his takes on tunes by Lightnin' Hopkins, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Little Walter, Mose Allison and Bo Diddley are as close to definitive as we're gonna get at this late date. Count Basie/Jimmy Rushing's "Goin' to Chicago," slowed to a funereal crawl, is all swampy mystery and Sam Cooke's "Bring It on Home to Me" hasn't been this tough since Eric Burdon grabbed hold of it. It's not all other people's blues though: Among the five new originals, "Transformation," with Beck providing the crisp licks, is more polished than the antique tracks but, nonetheless, burns with authenticity and love. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Yusuf/Cat Stevens

The Laughing Apple CAT-O-LOG/DECCA

To quote one of the signature songs from his pivotal 1970 album *Tea for the Tillerman*, **Yusuf Islam**, a.k.a. **Cat Stevens**, has been "On the Road to Find Out" for most of his life–and even that's a massive understatement. In 1977, three years after a near-death experience spurred a spiritual awakening, he converted to Islam and disavowed his career as one of the most beloved singer-songwriters of his generation. Nearly 30 years later, prompted by his son handing him a guitar, Yusuf rediscovered his creative yearnings and returned to music with 2006's *An Other Cup*–an open letter to his longtime fans, underscored by a poignant cover of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood." Since then, he's recorded three more albums. The latest, *The Laughing Apple*, coincides with the 50th anniversary of his debut, *Matthew & Son*, and its follow-up, *New Masters*, both released in 1967. What emerges is the voice of an old friend, sounding more familiar than ever, with a jocular intimacy that rivals the singer's best work (thanks to returning producer **Paul Samwell-Smith**, whose flawless ear for close-miking and clean takes helped make the early Cat Stevens LPs such gems). *The Laughing Apple* revisits key cuts from *New Masters*, but without the elaborate orchestration of the original. In this more acoustic setting, "Blackness of the Night" and "I'm So Sleepy" sound supple, sumptuous and revitalized, while the new single "See What Love Did to Me" and the previously unfinished "You Can Do (Whatever)!"–an outtake from the *Harold and Maude* soundtrack–ripple with a freewheeling breeziness. Add the brilliant guitar work of **Alun Davies**, an alum of all the '70s classics from "Wild World" to "Just Another Night," and the circle is complete. ***Bill Murphy***

Weezer

Weezer

Pacific Daydream CRUSH/ATLANTIC

It feels illogical to brand *Pacific Daydream* as **Weezer**'s first real "pop album." After all, some of **Rivers Cuomo**'s biggest hits are blatantly commercial ("Buddy Holly," "Beverly Hills"), loaded with exuberant silliness and the simple pleasure of the verse-chorus format. But the band's never sounded more in step with modern pop radio than they do on their 11th LP, emphasizing turbo-waxed hooks and downplaying their trademark metal-pop riffs. It's a conundrum. Weezer remain rejuvenated on their third album in three years, riding a wave of relevance (instead of awkwardly, shamelessly fumbling for it, as they did on, say, 2009's *Raditude*). But the more obsessed Cuomo becomes with pop perfection, the more generic his songs sound. "Feels Like Summer" recalls the same pyrotechnics-and-glitter, electro-rock approach of recent Fall Out Boy: all production bluster, little substance. And while Cuomo has utilized tried-and-true chord progressions throughout his career, even *he* sounds bored by the on-the-nose glam-pop guitars of "Mexican Fender" and predictable acoustic strum of "La Mancha Screwjob." Behind the blinding veneer of compressed beats and polished choruses, the band delves into a few intriguing new sounds: The breezy "Happy Hour" sounds like Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" as remixed by Diplo, and the tender "QB Blitz" is a companion piece to their 2001 hit "Island in the Sun" with a melancholy acoustic guitar, glockenspiel and stacked vocal harmonies. For Weezer, *Pacific Daydream* is like driving on cruise control in a sports car–this record may be smooth, but it isn't always the most memorable. ***Ryan Reed***

Stephen Stills and Judy Collins

Everybody Knows

WILDFLOWER/CLEOPATRA

They don't even bother with their first names on the CD cover. Judging from the title, they figure that you either already know who they are or you probably don't care. Just for the record though, "they" would be **Stephen Stills** and **Judy Collins**, and these two have some history. A long, long time ago, they were lovers. He wrote a song about her called "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" that he played many times with a band he's no longer involved with. The now exes decided–he at 72, she at 78–that it was time they made a record together. So here it is, and it's a real treat. Against all expectations, they open it singing in sweet harmony and trading off leads on "Handle With Care," the Traveling Wilburys tune, before settling in to more comfy territory. Among the originals, there's "Judy," written by Stills in 1968 at a Collins recording session, lost for decades, discovered and released as a demo a decade ago and now given a proper treatment. "Houses" is another remake, from Collins' 1975 *Judith*, a stately ballad that shows off her somehow undiminished vocal chops to an enchanting effect. The Leonard Cohen-penned title track, Tim Hardin's "Reason to Believe" and Bob Dylan's "Girl From the North Country" find the unlikely sweet spot where these oil-and-water voices cleave. The finale is another familiar one. "Questions," first recorded by Stills with Buffalo Springfield, then repurposed for Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, yields nothing new here, other than the fact that Stills must really like this song. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Jack Johnson

All the Light Above It Too

BRUSHFIRE

When it comes to Zen and the art of surfing, **Jack Johnson** is a bodhisattva. His music is an extension of that ethos–sunny, unhurried, laid-back and imbued with the intent of communing, as opposed to just communicating, with his fellow travelers. Sometimes that sentiment can come across as a bit idealistic and new-agey, but *All the Light Above It Too*, Johnson's first album since 2013, has an engaging socio-political narrative running through it. Starting with "Subplots," an airy acoustic number about maintaining a proper perspective and staying grounded in chaotic times, he reveals a worldliness that resolutely informs the rest of the album, from the bluesy lament of "Sunsets for Somebody Else" to the probing existential questions of "Is One Moon Enough?" Those questions are answered, in a sense, by "My Mind Is for Sale"–a groovy workout, rooted in the slack-key guitar stylings of his native Hawaii, that finds Johnson sounding unusually confrontational: "I don't care for your careless me first, gimme gimme appetite at all," he sings, and it's clear who he's calling out. As an artist with an activist streak–his advocacy for environmental causes is well-known and respected–Johnson knows how to craft a message and make it count. ***Bill Murphy***

Steve Earle

So You Wannabe an Outlaw

WARNER BROS.

Steve Earle calls his new album a tribute to Waylon Jennings–you can tell that from the title–and he does a damn good job of channeling the classic Waylon swagger and no-bullshit assertiveness throughout these dozen tracks. (There are four more on the vinyl, all covers, including Waylon's own "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way.") Working with his go-to band **The Dukes** and producer **Richard Bennett**, Earle is all fired up on some of the boldest new tunes that he's released in some time. The album, recorded in Austin, lays out that whole outlaw thing straight from the get-go in the **Willie Nelson**-assisted title track. "So you wannabe an outlaw, better take it from me/ Livin' on the highway, ain't everything it's supposed to be," he sings, atop the sort of audacious, in-your-face twanging that most contemporary country artists wouldn't recognize

if it stared them in the face. While it doesn't get more Waylon-esque than on "If Mama Coulda Seen Me," Earle never comes off as a looter. "Fixin' to Die" is way nasty—approaching metallic in its toughness in a way Jennings would never have thought to do—and "News From Colorado" and "The Girl on the Mountain" are mostly acoustic, sweet and vulnerable. *So You Wannabe an Outlaw* does its job—throwing light back in the direction of country's last great movement—but more than that, it's a real keeper of a Steve Earle record. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Chris Hillman

Bidin' My Time ROUNDER

There's an aura of bittersweetness surrounding **Chris Hillman**'s first solo recording in 12 years, and while it'll primarily be remembered as **Tom Petty**'s last studio project, that's not the whole story. It started as an idea with **Herb Pedersen**—a session legend who has known Hillman, a co-founder of the Byrds, since the late '60s. Pedersen was on the road in 2016 with Mudcrutch, Petty's reunited pre-Heartbreakers band from his early days in Gainesville, Fla., and suggested that an album with Hillman might be a lot of fun to make. Petty, no doubt fueled by his own love of The Byrds' music, said yes without hesitation. Tracked at Petty's studio in Southern California, *Bidin' My Time* enthusiastically embraces all the nostalgia that flows from say, **David Crosby** singing background vocals on Pete Seeger's "Bells of Rhymney" (which opens the album), or Petty joining Hillman's former bandmate **Roger McGuinn** to sling their guitars on "Here She Comes Again," a jangly pop ditty that Hillman and McGuinn wrote together—but never recorded in a studio—in the late '70s. And with most of the Heartbreakers behind him on "Given All I Can See" and "Restless," Hillman digs resolutely below the rock sheen to uncover the band's true country roots (which have long been known to committed Petty fans, of course). It's only fitting that he closes the 12-song set with a bluegrass-flavored version of Petty's "Wildflowers"—in the context of the album, it's the perfect choice, and given the unexpected passing of Petty just days after *Bidin' My Time*'s release, it's also just about as beautiful a tribute as can be paid from one great songwriter to another. ***Bill Murphy***

Hayley Jane and The Primates

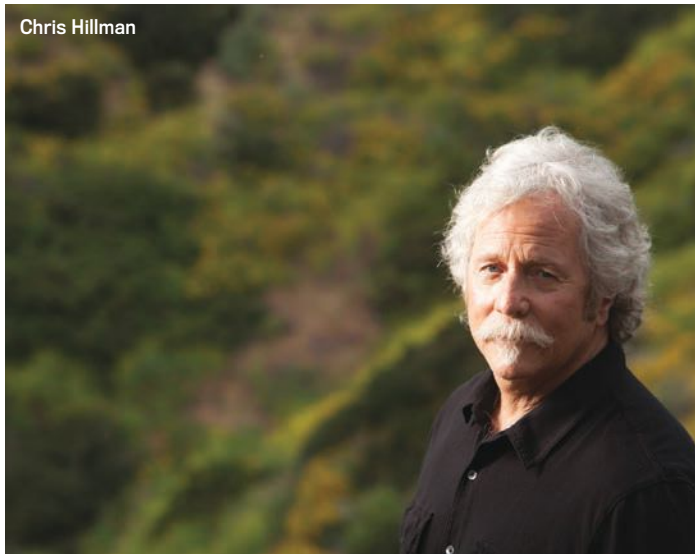
We're Here Now SELF-RELEASED

"Go ahead, call me a hurricane," **Hayley Jane** sneers midway through *We're Here Now*. It's a fitting line for the lead singer and titular member of **Hayley Jane and The Primates**, who has gradually made a name for herself as a force of nature on the jam scene. *We're Here Now* is the quintet's second full-length LP, and while the record showcases Jane's signature moxie and powerful pipes, it also highlights her bandmates' often-overlooked musical aptitude. Thanks to producer/Turkuaz mainstay **Craig Brodhead**, *We're Here Now* asserts that The Primates are much more than a backing band—simply hear **Justin Hancock**'s guitar solo on album opener "More Interesting" or how the rhythm section keep things rocking on funk-dance number "You Gotta Move." Simply put, Hayley Jane and The Primates ooze enthusiasm. You can hear it in Jane's tongue-twisting lyrics on "Cosmic Katrina," in her all-or-nothing vocals on "Madeline" and in her genuine laughter on "Mama." Despite *We're Here Now* running a little long, one of the album's strongest tracks is saved for last. "Creatures" starts sentimental but then transitions into a jam power-ballad with Jane, Hancock, bassist **Josh Carter** and second guitarist **Greg Smith** joining together to revel in their life as a "lucky bunch of creatures who can run around and dance if we want." After a decade of playing stages of all sizes, The Primates are entering a new era with *We're Here Now*. ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

Joey Alexander

Joey.Monk.Live! MOTÉMA

His story is the stuff of legend: Now 14, the Indonesian jazz-piano prodigy has already been wowing even the most jaded listeners and critics for the past few years, not only with his superior chops but also with his innate grasp of the music's depth and place. Three-time Grammy nominee **Joey Alexander** isn't one of those special young'uns who's good only at repeating what he hears. When he plays the piano, it becomes quickly apparent that he understands the music's history and role within the culture. But does that understanding extend to Thelonious Monk? That's a tough call. Monk created his own stylistic line of jazz piano. Many have covered him, some trying—successfully or not—to remake his innovations in their own image, others just content to leave well enough alone and turn out acceptable copies. Alexander's approach on this live set, cut at NYC's Jazz at Lincoln Center with bassist **Scott Colley** and drummer **Willie Jones III**, is somewhere in between. He knows that he doesn't yet have the goods to put his own stamp on these seven tracks, but he's confident enough to take it as far as he can. His solo during "Rhythm-a-Ning," is played at a blindingly rapid tempo, but not for the sake of speed alone and Alexander's


Chris Hillman

fingers never hit an extraneous note even at full velocity. Both his opening number, the covered-by-everyone "Round Midnight," and closer, "Pannonica," are performed solo by the pianist, with tenderness and wonderment in his voicings. And on "Straight No Chaser," he proves that he isn't a showboater, sharing the spotlight with his seasoned companions. You can now add generous bandleader to his growing list of accolades. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds

Who Built the Moon? SOUR MASH

Noel Gallagher has been satiating Oasis fans with **Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds** since the demise of his formative band nearly 10 years ago. But *Who Built the Moon?*, the group's third album, is not the sort of gritty, raucous music played by Oasis—or by Liam on his latest effort. Instead, it's glossy, reverb-heavy arena rock produced by Noel and **David Holmes** (which may explain the ambient, electronic vibe that occurs throughout). "It's a Beautiful World" is reminiscent of Coldplay, a shimmery pop number that feels designed to inspire radio listeners, while "Black & White Sunshine" is a chirping vintage tune with folk tendencies and a cinematic ambience. There's very little edge on this album, which isn't necessarily a criticism, but anyone expecting Noel's mouthy swagger to infiltrate the music may be disappointed. He's calm and collected here. Nothing feels like a protest or send-off to one of his detractors (namely Liam, whose new album seems all about taking the piss out of those around him). *Who Built the Moon?* is, for all intents and purposes, an amiable rock album that makes for reliably easy listening, especially single "Holy Mountain," which revs up the energy more so than the rest of the tracks. ***Emily Zemler***

The Barr Brothers

Queens of the Breakers SECRET CITY

The pervasive mini-narrative is that by ditching The Slip and forming **The Barr Brothers**, **Brad** and **Andrew Barr** evolved from experimental jam warriors into a scaled-back indie-folk act. But as they demonstrate on their third LP, *Queens of the Breakers*, the reality is more complicated. Working with harpist **Sarah Page**, the duo prod at genre conventions and their most intriguing songs fidget beyond the confines of an easy label. "Kompromat" conjures Afro-funk via deep Delta, pairing a swampy blues guitar riff, tumbling drums and squawking noise-rock guitar. "Hideous Glorious" lathers a heartland arena-rock arrangement in distortion and celestial vocal harmonies, fading out with Page's spine-chilling harp coda. These high-brow instrumental flavors maintain a sense of mystery from track to track, but when the Brothers strip away those layers, as they do on the fingerpicked folk of "Song That I Heard" and dust-blown blues-rock of "It Came to Me," there's little to differentiate the songs beyond straightforward Americana. Page, the group's not-so-secret weapon, challenged herself to expand the boundaries of her instrument, twisting the harp into guitar-and-synth-styled shapes. But, ironically, that urge to experiment deprives the band of a defining ingredient: When her majestic lines appear in their natural state, as they do on the gospel-styled "Hideous Glorious," the songs suddenly feel incomparable. That's The Barr Brothers' central dilemma: how far to push, and how often. The answer, on *Breakers* at least, is "all the way, all the time." ***Ryan Reed***

Zac Brown Band

Welcome Home

SOUTHERN GROUND/ELEKTRA

With September's Americana Awards in Nashville reminding us that roots music is more influential than ever, it's instructive to take a look back at **Zac Brown**'s *Welcome Home*, released this past May. Produced by **Dave Cobb**, whose rapid rise as Music City's go-to studio guru was sealed with Sturgill Simpson's outstanding *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music*, Brown's fifth outing with his stalwart backing band marks their return, in large measure, to an unvarnished country sound—which is probably what most ZBB fans would prefer, given the mixed reaction to 2015's genre-hopping *Jekyll + Hyde*. But *Welcome Home* isn't a total retreat to safer pastures; while an acoustic ballad like "My Old Man" is a stellar example of Brown's ability to channel real emotion through vivid storytelling, "Trying to Drive," a duet with singer-songwriter **Aslyn Mitchell** that the two first performed together on her 2009 album *The Dandelion Sessions*, gets updated to accentuate the song's hot-blooded rock leanings. Brown takes similar stabs at stirring up his inner rocker on "Roots" and "Real Thing," suggesting that even though it might be a risky career move for him to experiment with other styles, he's still not inclined to go gently into the Georgia sunset. ***Bill Murphy***

Jason Crosby

Cryptologic BLUE ROSE MUSIC

A musical polymath with perfect pitch, veteran New York-bred musician **Jason Crosby** built a career playing with jam titans like Robert Randolph, Zen Tricksters, God Street Wine and Susan Tedeschi. In 2013, after 24 years on the road, he switched coasts, planted roots in Marin County, Calif., and grew into a key member of the local scene dominated by Phil Lesh and Bob Weir. *Cryptologic* is the product of Crosby's West Coast migration, full of dreamy folk numbers and hallucinatory country tunes. "Was I Ever There?," with its "Truckin'"-style roadhouse groove, details the forlorn sentiments of an interstellar sailor. "When the light is right and I squint my sight/ I can almost get there," he sings. While Crosby's Empire State origins glimmer in the background of the record, *Cryptologic* is as much about the journey as it is about the destination. In "One of Those Places," he echoes this sentiment clearly: "Those city streets they have run dry/ So I've gone up to see the open sky." The whole album radiates a California sunshine warmth and it seems like Crosby is content with his new surroundings. *Cryptologic* is his first record in singer-songwriter mode, and he took on the mantle of writing and recording with focus and determination. Between two recording sessions, he played over a dozen instruments and collaborated with guest vocalist **Elliott Peck**, co-writer **Tim Bluhm**, as well as the rest of **The Mother Hips** as his backing band. In the end, *Cryptologic* emerged as something wholly unique: a psychotropic country record with equal parts head and heart.

Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Chris Thile

Thanks for Listening NONESUCH

When **Chris Thile** took over the coveted gig as host of *A Prairie Home Companion* in 2016, he knew that replacing Garrison Keillor, the show's creator and host since 1974, was no small task. Thile, a mandolin maestro and versatile singer, had appeared on the show often since he was in his teens, whether playing with the Punch Brothers, Nickel Creek or on his own. One way Thile vowed to reshape the program, while maintaining its essential folksy values, was to create original music for each episode. *Thanks for Listening* is a compendium of 10 of those newly penned songs, rerecorded in the studio and presented as something of an overview of where he is as a performer and composer these days, and doubling as an invitation to check out how he's remodeled the place. Thile's approach ranges from the minimalist, solo "Balboa" to the supersized, urban love-letter "Thank You, New York" to "Feedback Loop," a commentary on our social media addiction that could pass as a lost Simon & Garfunkel classic. Throughout, of course, Thile's virtuosic mandolin shines, but here, he's got a greater goal than reminding us that he is peerless on the instrument—with *Thanks for Listening*, Thile is both extending his sincere gratitude to us for coming along on his ride and laying down tracks toward wherever this might take him.

Jeff Tamarkin

Quicksand

Interiors EPITAPH

Over 20 years ago, **Quicksand** was the crown jewel of a burgeoning post-hardcore scene but, in what seemed like a poof of smoke, it was all gone. The NYC-based quartet was among a group of bands that had evolved out of hardcore and punk, fusing more melody and a pungent rock influence to create a fresh sound that shattered boundaries and defied previous genre conceptions. And while they only released two full-length albums and one EP, they left an indelible mark; *Slip* is as fresh today as it was when it debuted. Here's the bad news: Those expecting a cut and paste version of the old Quicksand will likely find themselves quite disappointed, as the ecstatic, punchy, jammy, tuned-down, guitar-driven machine that once was has drastically changed. With a cleaner, lighter sound, *Interiors* serves as a good example of why expectations can, and often do, distort judgment. There are echoes of yesteryear on tracks such as "Illuminant" and "Under the Screw"—both very Quicksand-sounding. But being that the former was released to the masses well before the rest of the album, folks might get the wrong idea, and that's too bad. "Cosmonauts," "Interiors" and "Hyperion" shine as gorgeous examples of the band's new sonic footprint, weaving into one another with beautiful symmetry. While frontman **Walter Schreifels** lacks the emphatic, raw delivery he possessed with Quicksand 1.0, he makes up for it in a polished, glistening style that defines Quicksand 2.0. Mission accomplished for a band that was all but extinct.

Mike Thomas

Kermit Ruffins/ Irvin Mayfield

A Beautiful World BASIN STREET

A Beautiful World is all about celebration: the 20th anniversary of Basin Street Records, the coming together of New Orleans mainstays and the resilience of the city itself. Famed trumpeters **Irvin Mayfield** and **Kermit Ruffins** helmed the production which includes more than 50 other musicians and was bolstered by funding from the New Orleans Convention and Visitor's Bureau. With a long list of guests, including the **Rebirth Brass Band**, **Dr. Michael White** and **Jason Marsalis**—many of them from the label's roster—they've cooked up a nonstop party of a record here, with nearly every track featuring a walk-on from someone of importance in the NOLA scene. Connected by several brief interludes of around a minute in length, the jam-packed jams, at their best, blow the roof off: "Footwork," featuring both Rebirth and **Cyril Neville**, is all drums, chanting and tuba street-parade style, while "Sister Soul," is what you might've gotten if Barry White went reggae. "Lexine" belongs on the contemporary R&B charts, and the cover of Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry Be Happy" strays just far enough from that classic's roots to get a certified Big Easy stamp across its face. "Just Playin'" is the kind of good-time blast that you can hear sneaking out onto the street on any given evening in this music-infatuated town. Ain't nothing like it anywhere else.

Jeff Tamarkin

Gizmodrome

Gizmodrome EARMUSIC

Supergroups rarely match our expectations. Period. For every Cream in the rock annals, there's an Asia. For every U.K., a GTR. And when two of your contributors—drummer **Stewart Copeland** (The Police) and guitarist **Adrian Belew** (King Crimson, Frank Zappa, Talking Heads)—are of such esteemed pedigree, you face an especially difficult creative choice. Juke away from the obvious or satiate the major fan cravings? On their wonky debut LP, **Gizmodrome** do both at once. As instrumentalists, the quartet dutifully blend their respective signatures: Copeland's reggae-punk propulsion, Belew's batshit, short-circuiting riffs, **Mark King**'s funk-fusion slap-bass and **Vittorio Cosma**'s symphonic keyboards. That's an intriguing combo for any prog fan, but there's a major caveat. For reasons that remain woefully unclear, Copeland took charge and decided to sing. His nasally tone and grating borderline sung/spoken-word delivery distract from start to finish. "Summer's Coming" sounds like *Ghost in the Machine*-era Police, but only if Copeland hijacked the sessions while Sting was on vacation. And the drummer's deranged sports announcer yelp on "Zombies in the Mall" wastes a spirited Afro-funk groove and spastic Belew solo. But it's worth powering through because the band's dynamic ensemble playing is so tight. Beneath Copeland's bullhorn ranting on "Amaka Pipa," his bandmates layer proggy organ and guitar wails into a majestic crescendo that recalls vintage Genesis. Still, it's frustrating knowing what could've been—sometimes the safest course is the smartest one. ***Ryan Reed***

NRBQ

Happy Talk OMNIVORE

There's one big problem with **NRBQ**'s latest: There's not enough of it. Not even close to enough. *Happy Talk*—the band's first new music since last year's *High Noon*, their boxed retrospective containing more than 100 tracks—is a mere five-song EP. Only 17 minutes of music? Guys, really? And how cruel to wave goodbye with the gentle, slightly fragile title track, that is quite possibly the most giddily surreal cover of the Rodgers and Hammerstein *South Pacific* classic that's ever come out of a recording studio. The Q can be as sweet and squishy as a bag of marshmallows when they want to be and here, they want to be. But not so sweet that they forget to step just a wee bit out and toss a dollop of that off-kilter thing they do so well—barely perceptible percussion ting-a-lings, sole remaining original member **Terry**

Adams' slightly left-of-center keys musings, **Scott Ligon**'s alternately crystalline and warped guitar, and an unexpectedly hushed Beach Boys-y vocal break. So delicious. Of the other covers, Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely" is, in its own way, just as habit-forming. Smartly avoiding the Orb's operatics, NRBQ retains the song's balladic structure but gives it a clip-clopping, shuffling vintage-country tempo that'll have you rethinking the tune's possibilities. That leaves the more standard-issue "Blues Blues Blues" and two new originals—the more typical Q rockers "Head on a Post" and "Yes, I Have a Banana"—that don't necessarily cover any new territory (Terry-tory?) but do whet the appetite for more. More than a half-century in, NRBQ remains one of America's underappreciated cultural treasures. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Glenn Morrow's Cry for Help

Glenn Morrow's Cry for Help

RHYME & REASON/BAR/NONE

In "Comfort Zone," the lead single off the self-titled debut from **Glenn Morrow's Cry for Help**, the singer-songwriter/guitarist brings it all back home in a most literal sense. Morrow, formerly with the Individuals and owner of Bar/None Records, is a music-scene staple in Hoboken, N.J., a city hit particularly hard by 2012's Hurricane Sandy. The storm, you'll recall, wreaked all sorts of havoc, and among the treasures lost were many a record collection. "Comfort Zone" catalogs one such loss—"everything from V to Z, that means XTC, Yo La Tengo and the Velvet Underground"—within the context of the overall destruction and suffering. Morrow's topical ballad, which features him on acoustic and the accompaniment of guitarist **Ric Sherman**, bassist **Mike Rosenberg** and drummer **Ron Metz**, is the exception in an album filled mainly with taut, crisp pop-rockers that veer toward the robust and bluesy side of things, and take great care to avoid fluff and excess. Morrow's writing is always direct and melodic—he's a real-talk storyteller who's not much interested in the ethereal or esoteric. Pick any track, and it'll speak to you the first time out and stick with you. From the instantly captivating opener "Bleecker and Third," through to the finale, the punchy "Return of the Wild One," this is smart, straightforward rock-and-roll that communicates honestly and unambiguously. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Baths

Romaplasm ANTICON

Los Angeles musician **Will Wiesenfeld**, a.k.a. **Baths**, is not interested in expected sounds or melodies. His creations, as heard on Baths' prior two albums and 2014 EP, are eclectic, occasionally discordant and often uncomfortably intimate. His latest release, *Romaplasm*, follows suit, particularly on tracks like "Human Bog," a number that eschews any traditional songwriting aesthetic for an emotionally wrought cacophony of noises that shouldn't be as harmonious as it is. There's a pop sensibility underneath it all, which mostly comes through on Wiesenfeld's thoughtful lyrics and the bouncy synth beats that pervade the album. On "Out," a sparkling, ambient indie-pop track, the musician croons happily as futuristic instrumentation ebbs and flows. In some cases, like on "Out," the experimentation works, but on other moments, like the aggressively over-stimulated mess that is "Superstructure," the tracks are overwhelmed by his own creativity. Some of it is just too buoyant, too bubble-gum sugary to affect a sincere response in the listener. This isn't music that you listen to on a leisurely weekend drive or as you commute home from work. It's more of a one-time curiosity listen, even for devoted fans of off-kilter electronic music. Wiesenfeld has instances of real emotion, like on "Extrasolar" and on "Human Bog," but they get buried between the rest of the music. There's always room for experimentation, especially when it's done with this sort of authenticity, but the results here don't really gel. At best, *Romaplasm* will urge you think about music and how it's made and what it should sound like. But at worst, it will grate and annoy you. *Emily Zemler*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Mucho minimalism. Indian music's cyclical rhythms exerted a strong influence on American Minimalism pioneer Terry Riley's music. So the only real surprise about the **Brooklyn Raga Massive**'s performance of Riley's *In C* (Northern Spy) is why it took so long for anyone to take on his infinitely adaptable work with Indian instrumentation. Sitar, tablas, bansuri flute, oud, hammered dulcimer and a vocalist join guitar, trumpet, violins and more strings and percussion for an excitingly relaxed—or vice versa—journey through Riley's constantly evolving masterpiece. It's a terrific introduction to both the composer and this remarkable Brooklyn collective of Asian-music fanatics.

A bird in the band. The 53 short musical cells that comprise *In C* are often reminiscent of bird songs, and his influence looms large in **Ka Baird**'s *Sapropelic Pycnic* (Drag City). "Sapropelic" means living in muddy putrefaction, and the former Spires That in the Sunset Rise member gets transcendentally funky with her flute, synthesizers and extended vocal techniques. Bird songs predominate in "Migration" and its soulful extension, "Transmigration." She explores the bardo in "Ka" (the Egyptian word for a part of the soul), an unintentional tribal tribute to hocketing Burundi singers. Her prior album (as Sapropelic Pycnic) paid tribute to John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, and the divine Alice C.'s spirit is strong here, too.

Black wholeness. While misery absolutely loves company, company generally prefers you to keep your sadness at arm's length. So major kudos to guitarist **Andrew Cresto** for acknowledging his long battle with depression as the impetus behind **Save Us From the Archon**'s self-released instrumental head trip, *Melancholia*. The Pittsburgh instrumental quartet's sixth album since 2012, *Melancholia* pinballs frantically between fractured-time motifs and brief respites. "Of Forgiveness" sounds like someone giving himself a severe talking-to, while "Trancing Nostalgia" resolves into tubular bells territory. Melancholy has rarely sounded quite so exuberant.

Shooting star. Born in 1962, Jamaican singer-songwriter **Hugh Mundell** was about 14 when he recorded the first tracks for what would become *Africa Must Be Free by 1983* (VP), a stone reggae masterpiece produced by **Augustus Pablo** and released in 1978. Singing about the brutality of slavery, family and why black men "fuss and fight," Mundell's young and thin yet earnest voice meshed emotively with Pablo's spare yet profound arrangements. VP's remastered reissue alternates Mundell's vocal sides with Pablo's deep dub versions, which are often embellished with the accompaniment of a snaking melodica. His desire unfulfilled, Mundell himself only made it to '83, when he was shot in the head while sitting in his car.

Horns of plenty. Trumpeter **Dave Douglas**' strong, swinging new album with **The Westerlies** (two trumpets, two trombones) and drummer **Anwar Marshall** was inspired largely by American modernist artist Stuart Davis, whose paintings, Elaine de Kooning wrote in 1957, have "the effect of a good sock on the jaw, sudden, emphatic and not completely pleasant." With its sharply drawn figures and colorful accents, however, *Little Giant Still Life* (Greenleaf), is completely pleasant. New Orleans second line meets New York expressions in its hard-edged free-for-all spirit. Heavy metal indeed.

Gun Outfit

Out of Range

PARADISE OF BACHELORS

Los Angeles' **Gun Outfit** take the long, geological, deep-time view. Their online bio starts *2001: A Space Odyssey*-style, with the dawning of human history and goes all mystic from there, with a mix of Terence McKenna, Joseph Campbell and Walter Benjamin. They're orienting themselves in something a little older than the most recent ripple of pop culture. And they're concerned with more than just tunes. Maybe it's the arid distant butte seen against a blue sky on the cover, but *Out of Range* feels like a record of the sun-blasted desert. It's music that's spiritually off the grid, as if the band—sometimes a duo, sometimes a trio, sometimes more, once from Olympia, Wash., now out of California—were riding out the world in a sandy hut, sifting through the history of American music. At various points, they echo the mystic poetry of artists like Silver Jews, Bill Callahan, Waylon Jennings, Meat Puppets and even the Grateful Dead, while reading philosophy and shamanic literature. (They've aptly called their sound "Western expanse.") The record opens with a song called "Ontological Intercourse," which gives you a good sense of where they're coming from—the exploration of being is part of their scope. One could cherry-pick piles of choice lyrics from every song. "So confused at the beginning/ I've grown accustomed toward the end/ There's a mountain in the middle/ Where do you think I've been?" goes a line on "Strange Insistence." And "I tried to quit/ 'Fore I quit again/ But I guess I'm really best at giving in." Or "Speed makes you a genius/ Cocaine will make you rich/ LSD shows you divinity/ Everything's all right on opiates." If you value lyrical smarts, Gun Outfit is a band to commune with at length. There's a brittle distinctness to the sound, as if everything was recorded through a Fender Twin Reverb amp, giving it a brightness and slightly warped twinkle. Gun Outfit have staked out that weird place where clarity becomes psychedelic. *John Adamian*

Courtney Barnett and Kurt Vile

Lotta Sea Lice MATADOR

Lotta Sea Lice sometimes feels more like two people having disconnected, dreamlike conversations that just happen to be set to music than like a collaborative musical effort. Take this stanza from "Blue Cheese": "I didn't mean to cough on her/ Forgot to add the fabric softener/ I met a girl named Tina/ That girl, that girl, supplies the reeferina." When they're not nonsensically bent, the words often slide into the mundane.

From "Over Everything," the lead track, on which the two compare notes on downtime preferences: "When I was young I liked to hear music blarin'/ And I wasn't carin' to neuter my jams with earplugs/ But these days I inhabitate a high-pitched ring over things/ So these days I plug 'em up." Which is to say, don't take it too seriously—just surrender and have fun with it, because they did. The nine songs cut by Aussie **Courtney Barnett** and American **Kurt Vile** during eight casual full-day sessions spread out over the course of almost a year and a half aren't meant to be for-the-ages game changers. With unfussy backing, the pair alternate lead vocals at times, meet in the middle with not-quite-pristine harmonies and do what they can to find a comfy place. It doesn't always work—some tunes bear repeated listening (the sing-songy cover of Jen Cloher's "Fear Is Like a Forest") and others are tossaways, too clever and/or precious for their own good. Perhaps there's some greater depth to a line like "You've gotta let it go before it takes you over/ Eastern standard open G/ Transpacific malady and calm is more conducive to the remedy," but your guess is as good as mine. The song is called "Let It Go." Good advice. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Charlotte Gainsbourg

Rest BECAUSE MUSIC

Rest marks the first time that **Charlotte Gainsbourg** has done most of the lyric writing on one of her albums. The French singer and actress has previously unveiled three studio albums, including her 1986 debut (which was written by her father Serge), and she's relied heavily on collaborators to create her vision. These 11 tracks, though, are the result of Gainsbourg's own ideas and thoughts, which are filtered through the pensive ambience of producer **SebastiAn**. "Lying With You," sparkles through a haze of melody, captivating the listener with Gainsbourg's breathy croon, while "Kate," written for the singer's recently deceased half-sister, is a striking piano ballad that resonates with emotional urgency. The majority of the tunes alternate between French and English—one exception is "Songbird in a Cage," penned by none other than **Paul McCartney**—but the message translates through each note regardless of language. Moments of childhood innocence permeate the music, rising to the forefront

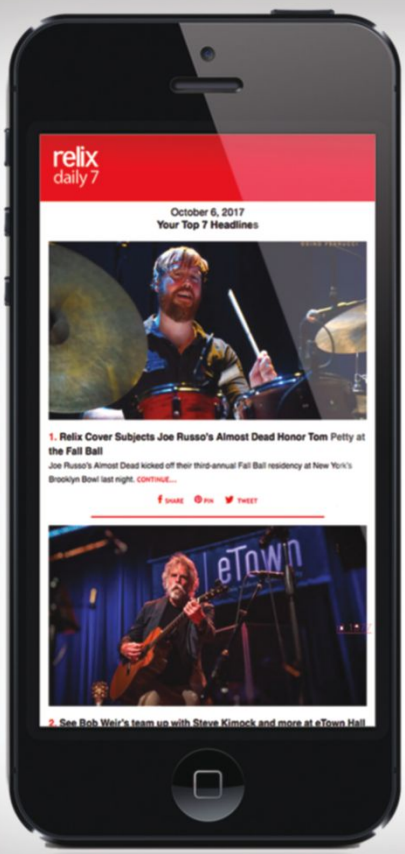
Courtney Barnett and Kurt Vile

on opener "Ring-A-Ring O'Roses" and closer "Les Oxalis," on which Gainsbourg's young daughter sweetly intones the alphabet. As a whole, the album feels different than the musician's prior. It's less removed, for obvious reasons, so there's a real sincerity that rings throughout—it feels like less of an illusion. The title track, sung in a whisper in both English and French, embraces this new aesthetic. As she sings, Gainsbourg seems to be murmuring directly into your ear, unfiltered and open. *Emily Zemler*

Formula 5

All Points North SELF-RELEASED

Formula 5 are a tenacious jamband who have grown far beyond their native Upstate New York. On their latest studio project *All Points North*, they wear their influences on their sleeves, blending spirited classic-jam-rock à la God Street Wine with jamtronica and playful, deceptively dark lyrics reminiscent of the Anastasio/Marshall songbook. (They even met their drummer waiting in line for Phish tickets.) And while Formula 5's inspirations are evident, they aren't egregious. In fact, their nods to jam pioneers are refreshingly honest. "The Birch Tree" may remind you of Phish's "Guyute," but coming in at just a little over seven minutes long, it morphs into a unique smooth jazz homage, showcasing keyboardist **Matt Richards**, drummer **Greg Marek** and guest trumpeter **Philippe Chow**. Guitarist **Joe Davis** shines on "Excalibur," where he leads his band toward jammy bliss, and throughout the record, bassist **James Woods** keeps this runaway train on the rails. *All Points North* is the quartet's third studio effort, and they've said it's their most mature. At first pass, it's difficult to describe a young, vibrant band like this as "mature," but they do show their sensitive side on the penultimate track "Do Tell" and display their technical prowess on the sweeping instrumental "Trout Waters Pt. I & II." Between this record and their relentless touring schedule, it's evident that Formula 5 have their eyes set on bigger stages, larger crowds and heavier jams. Like their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1 Mike Gordon

"Steps"
From the album *OGOGO*
ATO Records

Mike Gordon's new solo album OGOGO has arrived via Megaplum / ATO Records. OGOGO was produced by GRAMMY© Award-winning engineer Shawn Everett (The War On Drugs, Weezer, Alabama Shakes) and features Mike's regular touring band. Available now everywhere!

mike-gordon.com

2 The Barefoot Movement

"Baby Please Come Home"
From the album *The Barefoot Movement Christmas Album*
Self-Released

Nashville's acoustic quartet The Barefoot Movement fuses lush harmonies, thoughtful arrangements, and memorable melodies into a unique blend of charming, modern roots music. This award-winning act brings a pop sensibility to the genre with impressive vocal chops and instrumental dexterity from the fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and upright bass.

thebarefootmovementofficial.com

3 Grampas Grass

"Hold Our Position"
From the album *Greener*
Self-Released

Grampas Grass is the band you'll want to listen to on a long road trip. Songs with girth and stories to tell, melodies of heartache and woe, tales of love and redemption powered by dual guitars, dirty organs, and the dynamic voice of a sultry banshee who will grab you by the heart and entrance you.

grampasgrass.com

4 The Ries Brothers

"It's Never Me"
From the album *The View from the Outside*
Self-Released

The Ries Brothers are a unique multi genre duo. Fusing Blues, Reggae, funk and alt. Charlie (22) sings lead, while simultaneously playing drums & keyboard bass, giving the duo its full sound while Kevin's (18) guitar is well beyond his years. They have twice toured with the legendary band CHICAGO, and opened for Daughtry & Los Lonely Boys among others.

riesbrothers.com

5 Chain Station

"Where I Want To Be"
From the album
Where I Want To Be
Self-Released

Chain Station is a 4-piece, high-energy string band that is well steeped in Americana roots, with vocal harmonies that are high, lonesome, and tight. Dave Johnston of YMSB, "These guys really embody a great free-spirited sense of bluegrass that has found a home out here in Colorado. I really enjoy hearing these guys and you will too!"

chainstation.com

6 Katastro

"Bad News"
Single
Self-Released

Coming off of their 2016 release, Strange Nights, the Tempe, AZ foursome Katastro, show no signs of slowing down. Since their inception in 2007, the band has been touring and recording incessantly. Their new single, "Bad News", was released on October 13, 2017 with much more in store for the new year.

katastro.com

7 Thinkbendy

"Free"
From the album *CHANGE*
Self-Released

On the debut project, thinkbendy, from U-melt bassists, Adam Bendy explores the concept of small moments as spaces for life's most significant experiences. His dynamic arrangements and explosive songwriting reflect this belief, presenting the listener with thoughtful lyrics and a clean yet layered texture. New album, CHANGE, downloadable @ store.cdbaby.com/cd/thinkbendy.

thinkbendy.com

8 Monster Mike Welch and Mike Ledbetter

"Big Mama"
From the album *Right Place, Right Time*
Delta Groove Music

The newly-forged collaboration between Boston-based guitarist Monster Mike Welch and Chicago's own golden-voiced singer Mike Ledbetter takes the next evolutionary step forward in West Side Chicago blues and soul. "Right Place, Right Time" marks a scintillating recording debut that could be a modern day counterpart of Buddy Guy and Junior Wells.

deltagroovemusic.com

9 The Trees of Life

"The Riddler"
From the album *We Are All Connected*
Self-Released

Drawing from reggae, rock, and hip-hop influences, The Trees of Life are quickly becoming the new face and sound of Florida's resurging surf rock scene. Following up on the success of their second EP, Rooted in Appreciation, their new full-length album We Are All Connected is their most polished and ambitious release to date.

thetreesof.life

10 Black Iron Gathering

"Heart Song"
From the album *Where Is The Fear*
Self-Released

The Columbia, South Carolina based group, The Black Iron Gathering are first cousins to Americana, combining John Prine and Dropkick Murphy's, Langhorne Slim, the Pogue's, and Yonder Mountain String Band for a uniquely collective sound and style, wrinkles and all, that can't be pressed into some genre-specific mold.

facebook.com/theblackirongathering

11 Randy Steele

"Hideaway"
From the album *Songs from the Suck*
Self-Released

Randy Steele is a banjo playing singer/songwriter from Chattanooga Tennessee. He has toured extensively in the U.S. and in Europe both as a solo artist and fronting for Slim Pickins Bluegrass. Early in 2017 he self released his first solo album titled "Songs from the Suck" available at www.randysteelemusic.com.

randysteelemusic.com

12 Shawn Butzin

"Leaving Colorado"
From the album *Northern Trails*
Self-Released

Shawn Butzin is a singer-songwriter based out of Michigan. Shawn recently self-released his debut solo album, Northern Trails, which also features Andy Reed from Legal Matters (Omnivore Records). According to TwangriLA, "The album is really, really f-in' good." Shawn captures a nice blend of the modern and the classic Americana, folk, and alt-country.

shawnbutzinmusic.com

13 Jeremy James

"The High Road"
From the EP *The High Road*
Self-Released

"The High Road" from Upstate NY indie rockers Jeremy James and the Villaineers is packed with earnest lyrics an drippy guitar licks. The title track is a toe-tapping standout. "I'm no Jean Luc Picard" is an electric mandolin-led tale of a UFO sighting. The band shines on protest anthem "Choke."

jeremyjamesmusic.com

Editor's Pick: J. Roddy Walston and the Business 14

"The Wanting"
From the album *Destroyers of the Soft Life*
ATO Records

On Destroyers of the Soft Life, the fourth LP by J. Roddy Walston and The Business, the band pursued a brighter, more nuanced sound that teased out the band's latent pop sensibilities without skimping on energy or attitude. The most important rule was, "Nostalgia is a cancer — acknowledge that you are in the present."

jroddywalstonandthebusiness.com

JamOFF Winner: The Humidors 15

"Fight Song" Ft. Adryon De León
From the album *Movin' The Needle*
Self-Released

Pulling from the funk and soul heritage of their Bay Area home, The Humidors have crafted a new LP of honest, vintage party music with thick grooves and a progressive edge. Fronted by the dynamic Andre Cruz, this eight-piece band is a greasy, well-oiled funk machine driven by a commitment to the groove in all its shapes and forms.

musical heroes, they are primed to impress you in the studio but truly delight you onstage.
Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Amadou & Mariam

La Confusion BECAUSE MUSIC

Amadou Bagayoko and **Mariam Doumbia** have been musical partners since they met at the Malian Institute for the Young Blind in Bamako, Mali over 30 years ago. Eight well-received albums combining traditional music and modern pop have made them international stars–first gaining traction in Mali and West Africa in the '80s, before becoming a global sensation in 2005 with *Dimanche à Bamako*, produced by Manu Chao. On *La Confusion*, they continue expanding their crossover impulses. Drum loops, synthesizers and glossy urban/pop arrangements dominate the production, almost overwhelming the music's Malian roots. The notable exception is "Mokou Mokou," a ballad that features Bagayoko's acoustic work and Doumbia's gently insistent vocals, backed by her own multi-tracked harmonies. The minimal production makes it the album's most traditional sounding song. It also highlights the way Bagayoko's melodic embellishments complement Doumbia's vocals, an interplay that's absent in many of the tunes on the record. "Bofou Safou" is a thumping synth track that calls to mind the New Wave dance hits of the mid '80s, while the swinging funk of "Filaou Bessame"–a salute to "Les Peuls," an immigrant group from Mali–is driven by flute, sax and Doumbia's stirring vocals. Bagayoko sings lead on "Femmes du Monde," a mid-tempo R&B number that is marked by multi-layered percussion and lyrics that celebrate women's emancipation in Africa and their fight for equality.
J. Poet

Scott Miller

Ladies Auxiliary F.A.Y. RECORDINGS

Dating back to his early days with Knoxville, Tenn.'s V-Roys, **Scott Miller**'s songwriting has always balanced wit with woe. Moving back home to tend cattle at his family's Virginia ranch hasn't changed that one bit, although settling into a regular touring trio with bassist **Bryn Davies** and fiddler **Rayna Gellert** led him to the full but pure sound his songs were seeking. (*Ladies Auxiliary*'s studio band is rounded out by four more female players.) Opener "Epic Love" catches from the first listen, polished for radio as it slow-builds into layered harmonies. "This River's Yours/ This Valley's Mine" and "Someday/ Sometime" are classic emotive Miller–the latter taking full advantage of Gellert's soaring violin. Miller's storytelling traditionally draws from

Amadou & Mariam

Appalachian geography, but it's only evidenced here on the rolling "Ten Miles Down the Nine Mile Road" (a songwriting collaboration with **Robin** and **Linda Williams**) and "Lo Siento, Spanishburg, WVA," a Miller classic that he rerecorded (and improved, despite the removal of the "all of y'all can just fuck off" closing sing-along). There's plenty of humor here though, including the honky-tonk "Jacki With an Eye" and the barroom piano-driven "Mother-in-Law." Miller delivers a haunting take on Bill Monroe's "With Body and Soul," but it's on sleeper track "Middle Man" that he's at his lyrical best–"Am I able, or is it just Cain around here?" he asks, while in closing, he sings, "They raise taxes on all the hillbillies round here/ To put camels through the eyes of big needles round here." Miller is a consummate storyteller, merging historical fiction into love and loss, peppered with clever bon mots. On *Ladies Auxiliary*, he testifies, proving that the farming life is good for songwriting. *Stratton Lawrence*

Julien Baker

Turn Out the Lights MATADOR

Music journalist and culture critic Ellen Willis once wrote: "My deepest impulses are optimistic, an attitude that seems to me as spiritually necessary and proper as it is intellectually suspect." That quote could float over **Julien Baker**'s lovely *Turn Out the Lights*. Recorded at Ardent Studios in her native Memphis, Tenn., it's a sparse, spectral document, full of languid electric guitars, piano and whispers, occasionally punctuated by Baker letting loose with her enormous voice. Those spotlight bursts don't come often, but when they do, they spring from the speakers, like during the careening finale of "Claws in Your Back," with a rich and soaring melody that wouldn't sound out of place on an Adele record. Baker knows the value of sonic restraint but, lyrically, she holds nothing back and nothing's off the table: not faith, mental health, addiction or the way a body can be made to feel like a prison. The album's best song, "Everything That Helps You Sleep," centers on brokenness–bodies caving in, sleepless nights, sirens subbing in for the voice of the Holy Ghost–and it might be the most honest indie-rock hymn since Pedro the Lion's "Secret of the Easy Yoke." Baker's tunes express a profound spiritual need but, even as she trains her gaze on dark corners, she manages to squint hard enough to squeeze out a little light. "Maybe it's all gonna to turn out alright/ And I know that it's not/ But I have to believe that it is," she sings on "Appointments." It's another modern spiritual, one that says as much about the believer as the belief. Voices like Baker's are rare–as a singer and writer, she's offering up something truly special. *Jason Woodbury*

Ross Hammond and Jon Bafus

Masonic Lawn PRESCOTT/BIG WEEZUS

California's **Ross Hammond** has been going interesting places with a resonator guitar, a slide and some finger picks recently. The prolific player has delved into polyrhythmic Indian-tinged tabla collaborations, dreamy solo acoustic outings and other country-blues-leaning projects. Hammond has emerged as a versatile soloist, capable of getting ambient and loopy or raw and primitive, as the occasion warrants. His latest, a record of duo recordings with drummer **Jon Bafus**, is slightly more driving, with Hammond playing through an amp, upping the grit factor. These improvisations are fluid, melodic and rhythmically inventive, without being chained to a groove or a too-rigid pulse structure. The album brings to mind guitar-drums duo recordings between Larry Coryell and Elvin Jones, or Sandy Bull and Billy Higgins. Bafus, in subdued Steve Gadd fashion, does a lot with press rolls, and wisely doesn't clutter the exchanges with too many ringing cymbals, allowing the metallic gleam of Hammond's guitar to shine through. The music is anchored by a droning sound anchor, with Hammond unfurling graceful melodic curls and swoops above it all. There's a bluesy slur to "Subterranean Doom Coffee," but menace and manic stabs into space never override beauty in these improvisations.
John Adamian

Grateful Bluegrass Boys

Grateful Bluegrass Boys

SELF-RELEASED

It isn't a secret that, as a genre, bluegrass laid much of the hard-driving yet technical foundation for rock-and-roll. After all, legends like Jerry Garcia and Dickey Betts cut their teeth on country-rooted standards, learning to navigate the peaks and valleys of a jam while they picked at banjos and acoustic guitars. **The Grateful Bluegrass Boys** retroactively test those traditional roots of rock on their first full-length studio effort, reimagining hit songs like the Dead's "Touch of Grey" and the Eagles' "Take It Easy" with a healthy serving of Appalachian twang. The album, cut entirely from live studio performances, is chock-full of road-trip sing-alongs, and while progressive-bluegrass torchbearers like Yonder Mountain String Band may utilize covers as launch pads for heady improvisation, the Grateful Bluegrass Boys are happy to keep these tracks on the ground, giving them just enough of a backwoods vibe to get your toe tapping. Multi-instrumentalists/ vocalists **Aaron Redner** (Hot Buttered Rum) and **David Thom** (David Thom Band, Vintage Grass) sat at the helm for GBB, accompanied by bassist **Bryan Horne** (Hot Buttered Rum), accordionist **Ben Jacobs** (Achilles Wheel) and banjoist **Isaac Cantor** (Dusty Green Bones Band). You can hear the band's sonic cohesion set in on Led Zeppelin's "Going to California" and hold steady through Paul Simon's "Late in the Evening." Yes, there's some fromage–their take on Johnny Nash's "I Can See Clearly Now" comes to mind–and as far as bluegrass records go, no one's reinventing the wheel here. That being said, when it's time for a long drive through the mountains or a backyard barbecue, the Grateful Bluegrass Boys will make a welcome addition to your Dead-related music collection.
Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Reviews

OFF THE TRACKS

Grampas Grass

Greener SELF-RELEASED

Hailing from Southern California, **Grampas Grass** gave the world the first taste of their soulful sound with 2004 debut *These Are the Days*. And while their follow-up didn't come for over a decade, the band quickly went back into the studio for their new record and third release overall, *Greener*. The eight-track offering allows the Long Beach collective to showcase their blues-rock strength, fueled by the power of lead singer **Lisa Malsberger**'s earthy voice. Her supporting band, which includes her husband, songwriter **John Malsberger**, displays a penchant for upbeat, grounded tunes that don't shy away from extended solos—three of the album's tracks top the seven-minute mark, with one of the collection's highlights, "Vampire Kings," nearly reaching eight. The band members' musicianship warrants the spotlights, though, with lead guitarist **Brett Davis** and keyboardist **Eric Lockhart** showing off some well-honed chops in supporting and leading roles. "Needs," another lengthy track, follows Davis' soaring lead to pure rock territory, while the slinky "Hold Our Position" pairs a pounding, hooky chorus with sections of jazzy, Herbie Hancock-sounding keys from Lockhart. Opening track "On the Day I Die" shows off a bouncier side of the band, a sound that's echoed in "Days Gone By," up until the latter song delves into Santana-esque territory with a driving line from bassist **Chris Schmoke**. Grampas Grass have a great time playing off each other and exploring new territories, but always return to the bluesy foundation that has powered them for years.

Matt Inman

Bully

Losing SUB POP

Everything that made Nashville punks **Bully**'s debut LP *Feels Like* so electrifying—**Alicia Bognanno**'s resonant howl, lacerating lyrics and fuzzy hooks—is refined and accentuated on the band's second album (and first for Sub Pop) *Losing*. Whether documenting post-breakup malaise on the charging opener "Feel the Same," raging against institutionalized misogyny on "Seeing It" or interrogating herself on the fizzy "Blame," everything about Bognanno's songs feels sharper and more empathetic here. It's not difficult to discern the band's influences—Nirvana, the Breeders, Sonic Youth, Hole—both in the way the songs are caked in distortion and sneers as well as in the way their sugary pop core is so unyieldingly crystalized. "Guess There" could be a *Pinkerton* outtake; "Not the Way" balances Bognanno's grunts with sing-song melodicism. Bognanno's not big on overt sloganeering—the peppy "Kills to Be Resistant" probably won't make it on to any #resist playlists—but her writing here takes the "personal is political" path. "Everywhere I go there's people who/ Just want what they have/ Everywhere I go there's people who just want to hold on/ To what they have," she sings on "Either Way," exploring the current political mood from a position of personal revelation. And when she does get explicitly political, on album closer "Hate and Control," her grievances remain relational. Addressing her oppressors, she cuts straight to the core: "What is it about me/ That makes you so uncomfortable/ Can we just exist/ Without your hate and control?" *Jason Woodbury*

Escape-ism

Introduction to Escape-ism MERGE

Ian Svenonius doesn't make music. He crafts manifestos. His mythic D.C. punk band The Nation of Ulysses called their 1991 debut *13-Point Program to Destroy America* and his 2013 book was titled *Supernatural Strategies for Making a Rock 'n' Roll Group*. Svenonius is unparalleled when it comes to art-rock branding and rhetoric, so it makes sense that his first solo album under the name **Escape-ism** is titled *Introduction to Escape-ism*, as if he's providing his audience with an instruction manual. A nine song, self-described "Found-Sound-Dream-Drama," the LP is a casually scuzzy, dirty, minimalist, synth-punk screed. Cooing sneeringly over fuzz guitar and a motoring drum machine, Svenonius channels his inner Suicide—Martin Rev and Alan Vega sharing one wiry body—creating a foreboding tapestry of radical pop-art. Svenonius sings from a standpoint of dissatisfaction, launching rocks into the windows of the institutions around him. "Tryin' to break free from this destiny," he laments on "The Stars Get in the Way," raging against the universe's control of on his life. "When we wanted to walk/ They took away the street where we liked to walk," he remarks on "They Took the Waves," his voice tinged with a desire for retribution. As is the case with his other groups, The Make-Up and Chain & the Gang, there's soulfulness on display here that tinges the dread

and malice with a strutting eroticism. And on "Almost No One (Can Have My Love)," when he sings "There's one thing baby that is quite rare/ Something there is only one of," he might as well be describing himself. *Jason Woodbury*

King Crimson

Live in Chicago INNER KNOT

When **Robert Fripp** resurrected **King Crimson** in late-2013, one year after seemingly retiring from the music industry, it was only appropriate that he revamp the entire project—just as he'd done numerous times during the past four-plus decades. But even some hardcore fans were perplexed by the band's latest mutation: first a "seven-headed beast" lineup with three drummer/percussionists, a totally new frontman (singer/guitarist **Jakko Jakszyk**, replacing longtime member Adrian Belew) and returning reed expert **Mel Collins** (a staple on early LPs like 1970's *Lizard*) followed by an expanded "double-quartet" with an additional keyboardist. Though this reconfigured Crim appeared unwieldy on paper, it flourished onstage—gaining momentum and cohesion with each leg of its tour. This "official bootleg," *Live in Chicago*, documents the group's maniacal musical vision, which blurs the line between laser-focus and limber looseness. King Crimson proved they could utilize two drummers in the mid-'90s during their "double-trio" era, with Bill Bruford and **Pat Mastelotto** battering away in a polyrhythmic frenzy. But their current percussion trio (Mastelotto, **Gavin Harrison**, **Jeremy Stacey**) have rebuilt both old and new material from rhythm outward, highlighted by the hailstorm climax of 1974's "Fallen Angel," the electronic pokes and prods of 1973's "Easy Money" and the roto-tom madness of 1981's "Indiscipline." The octet weave songs from every Crimson iteration into a seamless sonic assault—equal parts ancient past and, seemingly, distant future. *Ryan Reed*

Futurebirds

Portico II VL/4L

Athens, Ga.-based outfit **Futurebirds** have delivered their brand of country-soaked indie-rock since their debut in 2013, and their latest offering comes in the form of part two of their *Portico* EP series, which began with last year's *Portico I*. Both releases pair a new original track with three covers and although they were recorded while the band was working on their next record, the songs were always meant to be a separate entity. In slight contrast to the first EP's single, the pensive "Only Here for Your Love," *Portico II*'s lone original composition is the more tongue-in-cheek, love-song romp "Olive Garden Daydream #47." The song's lyrics follow the hypothetical musings of a protagonist proposing a string of everyman romantic gestures, such as the titular trip to Olive Garden, thanks to a gift certificate from his sister or a road trip financed by credit card points where they can "empty out the entire minibar, get drunk, order pizzas and screw till dawn." Despite its humor, the tune's earnest intentions and comfortable melodic structure provide a warm kickoff to the four-song EP, which also features covers of Heron, Desire and Til Tuesday. The songs borrow from three distinct decades, though Desire's more recent "Under Your Spell" certainly takes from the '80s ethos in which Til Tuesday's "Voices Carry" was written. While Heron's twangy '70s cut "Big A" marks the biggest throwback, Futurebirds manage to adapt them all perfectly into their own laid-back wheelhouse. *Matt Inman*

Various Artists

Sincerely, L. Cohen: A Live Celebration of Leonard Cohen

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Legendary Canadian singer-songwriter/poet Leonard Cohen passed away in November 2016 and, two months later, Brooklyn's Music Hall of Williamsburg hosted an all-star tribute to the musician, bringing together an eclectic group of artists to deliver their own renditions of some of Cohen's classic material. *Sincerely, L. Cohen* offers a number of highlights from that night, opening with one of Cohen's most ubiquitous songs, "Hallelujah," which receives a stirring, instrumental setting from guitarist **Delicate Steve**. Cohen's lyrics rightly take center stage on many of the tracks, with stark cuts from Sonic Youth's **Lee Ranaldo** ("Famous Blue Raincoat"), **Richard Thompson** ("Bird on the Wire," "The Story of Isaac"), **Josh Ritter** ("Chelsea Hotel #2") and **Alana Amram** ("Suzanne"). Thompson's son **Teddy** gives a taste of the stories told during the concert by recounting a conversation with Cohen, while **Lenny Kaye** opts to read an excerpt from Cohen's novel *Beautiful Losers*. Organized by producer **Jesse Lauter**, City Winery Presents' **Hannah Gold** and recent Bob Weir collaborator **Josh Kaufman**, the evening was clearly a team effort. At various points, the large-scale ensemble included Lauter, Kaufman, The Walkmen's **Walter Martin**, Arcade Fire/Antibalas brass player **Stuart Bogie**, Darkside's **Dave Harrington**, bassist **Annie Nero**, and backing vocalists **Jocie Adams**, **Cassandra Jenkins** and **Leslie Mendelson**. The house band especially shines on the bouncy "Diamonds in the Mine," led by The Woes' **Osei Essed**, a soulful "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye,"

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Reviews

Walk The Moon

featuring **Amy Helm**, "Memories," highlighted by swaggering vocals from Deer Tick's **Ian O'Neil** and Bogie's wailing saxophone and a triumphant finale of "So Long, Marianne" led by Okkervil River's **Will Sheff**. As writer **Justin Joffe** explains in the album's liner notes: "Sentimental and scholarly, full of tearful singalongs and heartfelt remembrance, it was an evening Cohen would have appreciated." *Matt Inman*

Walk The Moon

What If Nothing RCA

Walk The Moon's last album, 2014's *Talking Is Hard*, came as a welcome surprise. The songs brought a New Wave '80s vibe and unabashed energy in every beat, and still felt varied enough to not get tired. The new album, *What If Nothing*, is similar in tone, centered on bouncing melodies, thudding synth beats and a swaggering aesthetic that is equal parts punk and electro-clash. "Headphones" surges with reverb-heavy riffs as singer **Nicholas Petricca** yelps and howls with in-the-moment fervor, while "Surrender" has a soaring '80s-style anthem sensibility that aches with heartbreak. It's by no means a perfect collection of songs, although Walk The Moon give every track their all. "Kamikaze" sounds like any other radio pop song and "Sound of Awakening" unnecessarily distorts Petricca's vocals through what sounds like a vocoder (and embraces a strangely slow tempo that seems off-kilter). These latter noises are likely the result of over-experimentation where none was needed or of a lack of self-editing. Still, there are fun moments throughout, especially "Can't Sleep (Wolves)," a dancey post-punk number with great energy and a memorable hook. Closer "Lost in the Wild" also builds up effectively to a shimmering beat and sing-along chorus. It's the sort of song you might expect from The Killers 10 years ago and, here, it really works. At 13 tracks, *What If Nothing* could have been cut down slightly, giving the better songs a greater chance to stand out. *Emily Zemler*

Tim Kasher

No Resolution 15 PASSENGER

Akin to an indie-rock opera, **Tim Kasher**'s *No Resolution* flows like a river doubling back on itself, revisiting tunes with several reprises and beginning with a pared-down melody that hints at its expansive finale. Kasher has come to be known for such compositions, both with his solo work and his output with bands Cursive and The Good Life. This time around, he's going even further down the rabbit hole, pairing *No Resolution* with a film of the same name that he wrote and directed. The album—much like the film—deals with a young couple working through several issues, more broadly, the notions of adulthood and settling down. The image of a pregnancy test and rumination on children emerge in "Runts," while "An Answer for Everything" has the couple reminiscing of simpler days in their relationship. All along, Kasher matches his clear and poignant lyrics with lush arrangements of strings, guitar, piano, percussion and horns, turning the whole affair into a grandiose production of emotional honesty. The bouncy "Messes" serves as a sort of belly-of-the-whale moment in the latter third of the album, with lyrics like, "If there's a reason we exist/ Surely I am blowing it," while several songs later, Kasher delivers the telling final track of the opus, "Not Over You," a slow-burner that ends in flowing, wonderfully over-the-top strings echoing his chorus of "I am not over you being over me" into infinity. *Matt Inman*

PLUNDERING THE VAULTS

Colosseum

Those Who Are About to Die Salute You/Valentyne Suite (Remastered & Expanded Editions) ESOTERIC

In the late-1960s, rock music was a lump of misshapen clay: The blues craze was dying, psychedelia was slowly morphing into prog and jazz-fusion was creeping into the mainstream. No band epitomized this sonic amalgamation better than **Colosseum**, who deftly weaved traditional blues riffs with snazzy jazz rhythms and progressive, multi-tiered arrangements. On their first two albums, 1969's *Those Who Are About to Die Salute You* and *Valentyne Suite*, the British quintet feasted on that era's "anything goes" spirit, which they had an under-acknowledged role in creating. *Salute You* showcases the band's intricate ensemble playing, namely **Dick Heckstall-Smith**'s wailing, harmonized saxophones and **Dave Greenslade**'s vintage blasts of Hammond B-3 organ. Looking back, the actual compositions were embryonic in scope—largely rote blues patterns (like in the lumbering "Walking in the Park" and "Plenty Hard Luck") that served as generic foundations for jamming and solos. But when the band dreamt on a grander scale, their songs, to this day, sound like the future. "Mandarin" slinks from Greenslade's Asian-tinted organ theme and Heckstall-Smith's eerie soprano sax into **Tony Reeves**' wah-wah bass solo. "Those About to Die," a funky full-band workout, cooks like peak-period Traffic—only more accomplished, as evidenced by **Jon Hiseman**'s swinging jazz kit. Though they released *Valentyne Suite* only eight months later, Colosseum developed exponentially in that span. By this point, they'd earned the newly conceived "progressive rock" label, sprinkling in experimental flourishes (the wild percussion breakdown in "The Machine Demands a Sacrifice") and blurring the boundaries of jazz, hard rock, classical and, yes, "Do Wah Diddy Diddy" on the title track—a nearly 17-minute frenzy that rivals King Crimson's more heralded epic, "In the Court of the Crimson King" in scope. ***Ryan Reed***

Mississippi John Hurt

Live at Oberlin College 4-15-65

ROCKBEAT

The music on *Live at Oberlin College 4-15-65* may sound familiar to astute fans of the influential country-blues singer—the 1965 **Mississippi John Hurt** concert at the Ohio institution has been released and rereleased numerous times under different titles and in different configurations over the years. All of its 21 songs are included on this latest version, but whether they are presented in the correct original playing order—many previous releases show different track orders, including 1971's *The Best of...* on Vanguard—is anyone's guess. The brief liner notes provided by **Robert Schert**, who actually recorded the show, never address the sequence. Nonetheless, the recording holds up all these decades later. Hurt was active all the way back in the '20s, but was rediscovered just in time to be worshiped by the folk-revival crowd of the '60s who embraced his simple, unadorned acoustic performances of now-classic numbers like "Candy

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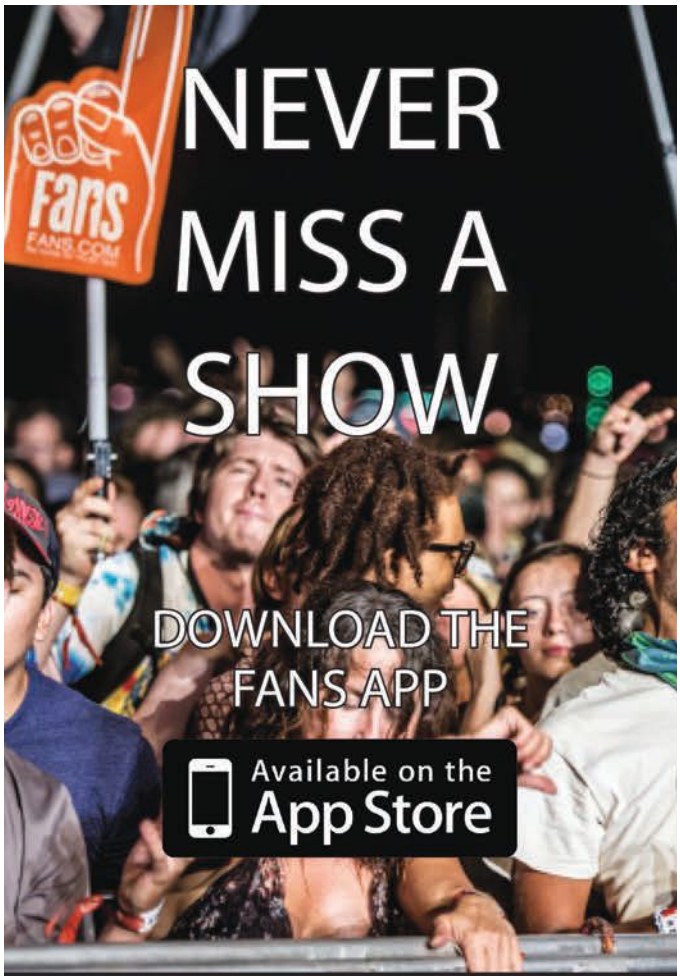

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Reviews

Man," "Nobody's Business (But Mine)" and "Salty Dog Blues," all of which are presented early in the program along with several gospel hymns. Latter-day Hurt employed an easygoing, casual vocal approach—not the rough-hewn growl of many contemporaries—and a spirited fingerpicking guitar style to match, knitting in subtle slide licks seamlessly (as in "Talkin' Casey"). In both his music and banter, he comes off as an endearing, good-natured performer who was probably still marveling at his recent rediscovery, happy to be presenting what was, even then, ancient music to a new batch of appreciative listeners.

Jeff Tamarkin

Alex Chilton

A Man Called Destruction OMNIVORE

Chris Bell

Looking Forward: The Roots of Big Star OMNIVORE

If you were to go by the Billboard charts, then Big Star—the relatively short-lived Memphis, Tenn. band of the early '70s—was a nonentity. No album by Big Star ever made the trade publication's singles or album charts; neither did any solo work by its key figures, **Alex Chilton** (who had previously scored a number one single with the Box Tops, "The Letter") or **Chris Bell**. Yet in the years since, Big Star has grown in stature as a beloved progenitor of the power-pop movement, and collectors have long sought every note they recorded. Both Bell and Chilton are gone now—the former in 1978, the latter in 2010—but the retrospective releases keep arriving.

A Man Called Destruction was Chilton's 1995 album release on Ardent Records, recorded—as was all of Big Star's music—at the studio of the same name. A mix of original material and eclectic covers (including Jan and Dean's "New Girl in School"), its songs largely took a straight-ahead pop-rock path, augmented by typically Memphian R&B horn charts, with a tad of rockabilly ("Boplexity") and uptempo blues ("Devil Girl") tossed in. The expansion adds seven tracks to the list, including a swinging take on the Clarence "Frogman" Henry's NOLA staple "(I Don't Know Why) But I Do" and a rough, bluesier mix of "Don't Know Anymore" than the one on the original release. *Looking Forward* is a 22-track compilation, featuring various artists and six previously unreleased numbers, the nexus of which is Bell, heard via early bands like Rock City and Icewater. Although there are a few nods to the hippie rock still in the air, Bell and his collaborators (including future Big Star drummer **Jody Stephens**)

Chris Bell

preferred the jingle-jangle of predecessors like The Byrds, and a tight three-minute package to the excesses of the day. *Jeff Tamarkin*

The Zodiac: Cosmic Sounds

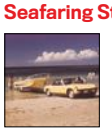
Various Artists RHINO/ELEKTRA

Take the hokiest concept album you can imagine. Now make it 15 times goofier. The result might resemble 1967's *The Zodiac: Cosmic Sounds*, an adorably daft cycle structured around the 12 signs of the zodiac. Five decades ago, at peak psychedelia, the premise probably sounded "far out." Today, the LP—with the front cover's billowing bubble letters and song titles like "Capricorn–The Uncapricious Climber" promises parody more than a genuine head trip. But as Rhino's limited edition reissue attests, *The Zodiac* is worth the deep plunge. First, the backstory: Elektra Records founder **Jac Holzman** spearheaded the project with producer **Alex Hassilev** and songwriter **Mort Garson**, who recruited some of the era's hottest session players (including bassist **Carol Kaye** and drummer **Hal Blaine**, part of the famous LA **Wrecking Crew**) to record their dopey opus, a series of trippy instrumentals infused with **Cyrus Faryar**'s narration. Those lyrics keep the album firmly planted in camp. (Sample: "Mars, the master matchmaker/ Sulphurizes the sky/ Incendiary diamonds scorch the earth." Goodness gracious.) But the jams underscoring that nonsense are captivating on their own merits: "Gemini–The Cool Eye" recalls early Frank Zappa with its spastic guitar riff; "Cancer–The Moon Child" is first-rate psych-rock with wild Moog synth. Throughout, there's bass flute, sitar, church bells and percussion that sounds like a million rain sticks being bashed against a tree—it's insane to think a major label bankrolled this madness. Some psych-heads will justifiably roll their eyes at the dated vibe. For the rest of us, it's an excuse to fire up the bong and throw on the tie-dye.

Ryan Reed

Various Artists

Seafaring Strangers: Private Yacht NUMERO GROUP



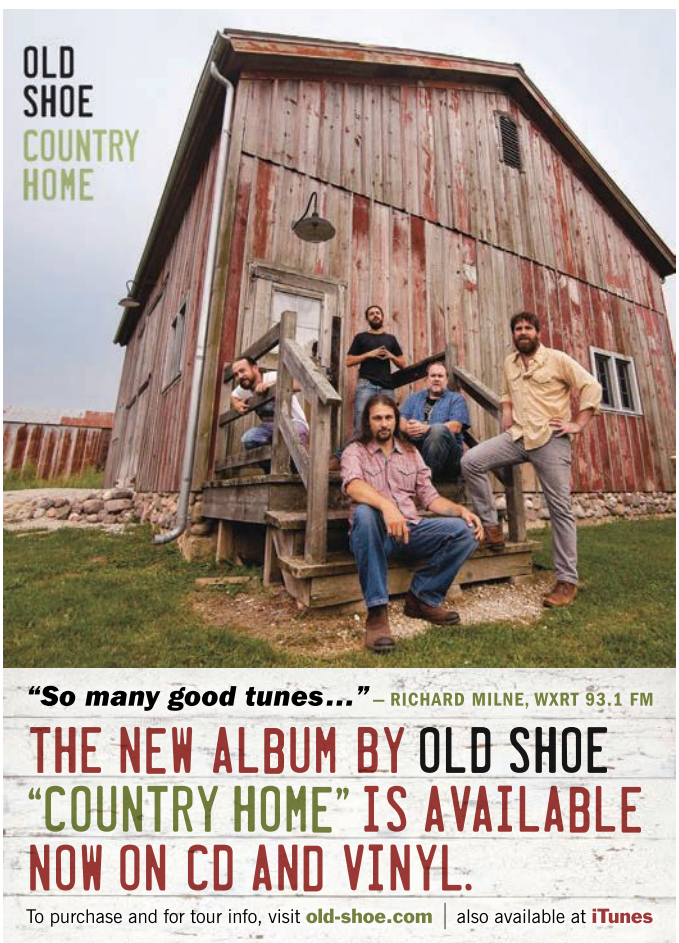
Defining what is and isn't "yacht rock" has proved to be a full-time endeavor for J.D. Ryznar, Hunter Stair, Steve Huey and David B. Lyons, the creators of the mid-2000s internet show that coined and popularized the term. The comedy team's podcast, *Beyond Yacht Rock*, routinely devotes episodes to arbitrating whether songs are "Yacht or Not" using the mostly subjective "Yachtski Scale." But broadly speaking, the term encompasses a wide swath of soul, folk, soft rock and jazzy fusion, all of which can be found in abundance on Chicago-based reissue label Numero Group's new compilation, *Seafaring Strangers: Private Yacht*. A thoughtfully assembled set of songs culled mostly from the late '70s to mid-'80s, the moods here shift from boogieing post-disco to lush AOR. For those craving erudite smoothness, there are many highlights. On "Wrap Myself Up in Your Love," **Jim Spencer** tries out a series of increasingly bawdy come-ons over harmonized backing vocals and funky bass. While the best tune, "Before I Thrill Again," comes from the most recognizable name, West Coast royalty **Ned Doheny**, it wouldn't be a Numero set without a few brilliant obscurities, like the Beach Boys-styled "Don't It Make You Feel" by Florida's **Breathers** and the affecting Fender Rhodes and drum-machine ballad "Don't Be So Nice" by Minnesota pianist **Chuck Senrick**. Yacht or not, its smoothness is matched by its resonant sadness. Wave on.

Jason Woodbury

Chris Farlowe & the Thunderbirds

The Beginning JIMMY PAGE

In 1961, seven years before **Jimmy Page** transformed the history of rock music by forming Led Zeppelin, the prolific session guitarist stumbled on a fiery blues-soul band, the **Thunderbirds**, onstage in London. Riveted by vocalist **Chris Farlowe** and guitarist **Bobby Taylor**, he offered to record the group's debut demo at nearby RG Jones Sound Studio in Morden. That session was pivotal in two ways: Not only did the connection help launch Farlowe's career, but it also proved that Page was capable of manning the producer's chair, cementing a confidence that flowered throughout his tenure with Led Zeppelin. Those 12 recordings remained shelved for 56 years, but Page—perhaps in a nostalgic mood, given his recent Zeppelin reissues—dusted off the tapes for retrospective showcase *The Beginning*. Maybe "dusted" isn't the right word: As the hissy opening seconds of instrumental "Entry of the Slaves" make clear, these tracks sound more like they've been buried under mountains of dirt for the past half-century. But the songs themselves offer an often riveting glance into early rock history—a pre-Beatles-era London where possibilities felt limitless. These Thunderbirds were first-rate players, spicing up the rote blues of "Slaves" and jazzy swirl of "Spring Is Near" with visceral guitar solos and tom-tom flourishes. And Farlowe, even at this young age, oozed charisma with that golden, wise-beyond-his-years blues moan. His voice sounds primed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for any challenge, whether scatting to the guitar solo on their version of Carl Perkins' "Matchbox" or crooning soulfully on waltz ballad "Just a Dream." As for Page's contributions? Well, this is a 1961 demo, not "Stairway to Heaven." But Zeppelin completists should seek out *The Beginning* for its historical importance alone. ***Ryan Reed***

Various Artists

Even a Tree Can Shed Tears: Japanese Folk & Rock 1969–1973 LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

There's probably a dissertation lurking in the mists of history that surrounds Japan's post-war generation and its attempts to absorb and reflect the American and British pop music of the '60s (The Beatles in particular) back onto the world. Of course, as hopeful and innocent as it all seemed, it inevitably came crashing down at the end of the decade, with Japan's "angura" or underground taking shape as cultural upheaval, fueled by a restless youth in Tokyo and the neighboring cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe, ushered in the wave of "New Music." *Even a Tree Can Shed Tears* focuses on one of the most prominent strains of that youth rebellion, collecting an impressive set of folk and rock nuggets that stand on their own as heartfelt expressions of the gritty disillusion, darkness and malaise of the times. Among the standout artists, there's **Sachiko Kanenobu**, who channels Joni Mitchell with remarkable ease, **Masato Minami**, who croons with a soulfulness reminiscent of *New Morning*-era Dylan and **Haruomi Hosono**, whose beautifully off-kilter ballad "Boku Wa Chotto" presages the solid songwriting chops he would bring to the world-renowned Yellow Magic Orchestra a few years later. Curated by **Jake Orrall** and packaged with an in-depth essay by LA-based writer **Yosuke Kitazawa**, *Even a Tree Can Shed Tears* is yet another carefully presented musical snapshot—now a signature of the Light in the Attic label—that makes a forgotten era worth remembering. ***Bill Murphy***

The Meters

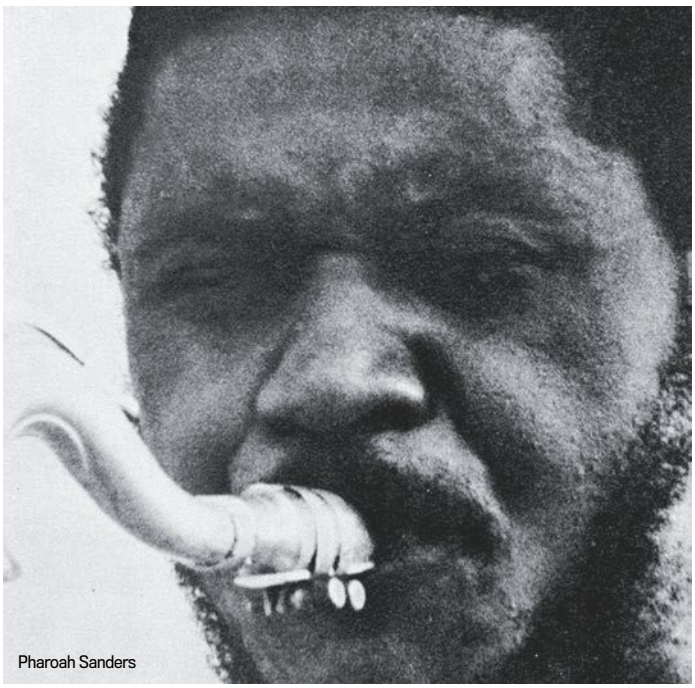
A Message From The Meters: The Complete Josie, Reprise & Warner Bros. Singles 1968–1977 REAL GONE

What makes the concept of **The Meters**' singles collection so intriguing is that the New Orleans funk band wasn't especially successful on the singles charts. The Meters only reached the *Billboard* R&B top 10 twice, both times in 1969, with "Sophisticated Cissy" and "Cissy Strut," and never crossed over into the trade publication's Top 10 at all—the latter came closest, peaking at number 23 on the Hot 100. Still, most of their best-known tunes were, at some point, issued as singles, and they're all collected on these two discs, 40 A- and B-sides, in chronological order. That layout is a fascinating way to study the evolution of the group, whose key members—**Art Neville**, **Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste**, **Leo Nocentelli** and **George Porter Jr.**—are revered today by virtually every musician entranced by the art of the groove. In much the same sense as underground rock bands like the MC5 and the Stooges, The Meters failed to sell in big numbers during their lifetime, but have since been lauded as having inspired entire new streams of music. Their earliest jams, the above-mentioned two as well as "Look-Ka Py Py" and "Chicken Strut," in particular, and several mid-'70s workouts ("Hey Pocky A-Way"), have since been dissected, inch-by-inch, by jamband denizens and hip-hop producers alike, but the originals can never be touched in terms of innovativeness and durability. Much of what's included here was previously gathered on the 1995 Rhino set *Funkify Your Life: The Meters Anthology*, but A *Message From...* provides a fresh, timely reexamination (at press time, they'd just been nominated for induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for the fourth time) of one of the cornerstones of so much contemporary music. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Pharoah Sanders

Tauhid
Jewels of Thought
Summun Bukmun Umyun
(Deaf Dumb Blind) ANTHOLOGY

Having recently turned 77, **Pharoah Sanders** is one of the last major remaining innovators of mid-20th-century jazz tenor saxophone still active. These three albums, released between 1967–1970 on the Impulse! label, stem from what was arguably Sanders' most creatively fertile period as a leader and



Pharoah Sanders

were recorded after the passing of John Coltrane, with whom he'd worked for the previous few years. Available separately on vinyl or as a boxed set, they mark Sanders' headlong dive into what was already being termed "free jazz," incorporating the diverse influences and spiritual vibe of those late Coltrane sessions while cutting a new, nothing-held-back path that influenced a whole other stream of jazz. *Tauhid*, Sanders' debut for Impulse!, is relatively tame compared to the more relentlessly squealing sax recordings to come. Sanders and his musicians are tentative with their experimentation on the three pieces, shaping defined moods rather than running amok. Consequently, *Tauhid* holds up best out of these three. Sanders, along with an all-star team, released *Jewels of Thought* two years later in 1969. The record splits the set in half: the meditative "Hum-Allah-Hum-Allah-Hum-Allah" and the more free-form "Sun in Aquarius," which roller-coasters from primal freakout of the first order to calmer, but no less intense, interludes. For *Summun Bukmun Umyun (Deaf Dumb Blind)* featuring trumpeter **Woody Shaw** and alto saxophonist **Gary Bartz**, among others, Sanders again split his set to create two distinctive tracks: the Spanish-tinged "Summun Bukmun Umyun" and the open-ended exploration "Let Us Go Into the House of the Lord." None of this is easy listening, and some is rather taxing, but all of it is rich in texture and unfettered feistiness.

Jeff Tamarkin

Bob Minkin (Jerry Garcia Band)

Los Camaroes

Resurrection Los Vol. 1

ANALOG AFRICA

Los Camaroes' 1979 album, *Resurrection Los Vol. 1*, was the last record released by the legendary Cameroonian band who first came together in the late '60s. Combining both West African and Congolese influences, the album contains echoes of juju and soukous styles and big, beefy, sliding bass lines. Four-on-the-floor bass drum patterns lock grooves in place. The interplay between the guitar parts is astounding—some patterns are scribbled in the background, some scrubbed in the middle and others pecked out over the top. The guitar lines make a mesh of cascading, tumbling or stately swirling repetitions. Guitarist **Messi Martin** devised a unique technique of wedging dampened and wadded bits of paper between his strings. The effect mimics the buzzing depth of the balafon. (You could consider it an Afro-pop guitar version of John Cage's approach for prepared piano.) Martin had left the group and Los Camaroes had essentially broken up before the members were reassembled with some new blood for one last record, hence the title. (There wouldn't be a volume two of this resurrection, but asking for two resurrections might be a little much.) Martin and Los Camaroes played an updated version of *bikutsi*, a popular exuberant dance style. "Bezimbi" captures the sonic textures, the 6/8 rhythm and the relentlessly offbeat accents of the sound. This reissue fits nicely next to other releases that flesh out our perspectives on the richness of popular music from throughout West Africa in 1960s and '70s. ***John Adamian***

DEAD RELICS BY JESSE JARNOW

Jerry Garcia Band

Cats Under the Stars ROUND

Jerry Garcia/Howard Wales

Side Trips: Volume One ROUND

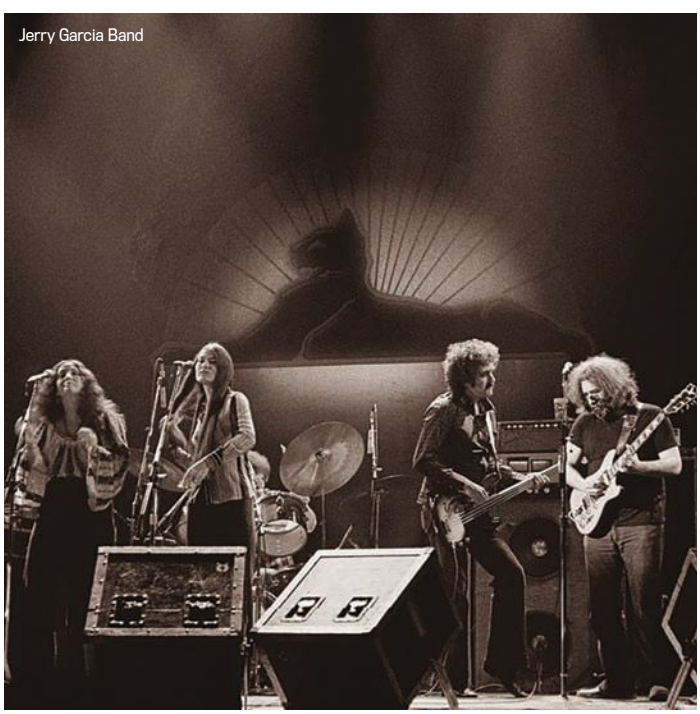
Grateful Dead

Dave's Picks, Vol. 24: Berkeley Community Theatre, Berkeley, CA, 8/25/72 RHINO

Once upon a time, sparkling used vinyl copies of the **Jerry Garcia Band**'s *Cats Under the Stars* were cheap and plentiful. One of two Garcia solo releases comprised entirely of new original songs, the 1978 album was a flop, although Garcia cited it as his favorite record. With an ongoing vinyl revival and a never-ending rediscovery of Garcia starting to drive the price up, the new reissue by the revived Round Records is well deserved and sounds beautiful. Recorded in lieu of a summer Dead tour in 1977, *Cats* is rife with semi-lost Jerry Garcia/**Robert Hunter** classics like "Gomorrah" and "Palm Sunday," and the sexy-time Deadhead mixtape staple, "Love in the Afternoon," co-penned by Hunter and JGB bassist/majordomo **John Kahn**. Forty years later, *Cats Under the Stars* stands nearly alone, in a world apart from Garcia's sprawling live canon, patiently awaiting the next Head to drop the needle.

Side Trips: Volume One is an almost-unknown keystone in the Garcia canon. Originally released in 1998, and now available on vinyl for the first time and for streaming, it contains the only known documentation of Garcia's regular 1970 space-jazz jams with keyboardist **Howard Wales** at The Matrix in 1970. The 65-minute recording, now a double LP, is far vibier, less funky and more cosmically questing than the duo's eventual *Hooteroll?* Garcia is still finding his chops, but the quiet Martian valleys colored by Wales' intimate Rhodes make for a deeply satisfying planet to visit. This is also the earliest recording of Garcia playing with lifelong collaborator Kahn and just prior to Merl Saunders replacing Wales, setting off their eventual evolution into the Jerry Garcia Band. Garcia would almost never again linger in such moody terrain. Perhaps *Side Trips: Volume Two* will finally follow.

From the recently returned stash of tapes by engineer **Betty Cantor-Jackson** comes the newest installment of the **Grateful Dead**'s *Dave's Picks*: two sets from the heart of 1972, immediately preceding the infamous Field Trip benefit for the Springfield Creamery documented in *Sunshine Daydream*. Highlighted by an uncirculated reel containing the last part of the second set, **David Lemieux**'s newest *Pick* includes the latter half of a 28-minute "The Other One," dripping with delicate feedback, landing in an early and still-forming "Stella Blue," just finding its place in the post-jam slot. There's a sweet "Bird Song" and a nicely melted "Playing in the Band." If little of it is revelatory by Dead standards, then most of it is wonderful—just another freak band jamming in the People's Republic of Berkeley.



Jerry Garcia Band

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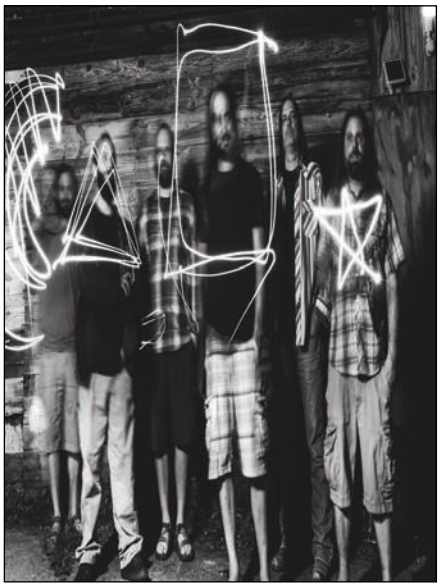

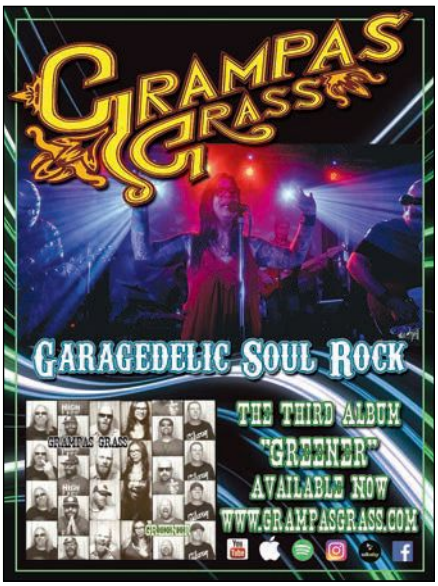

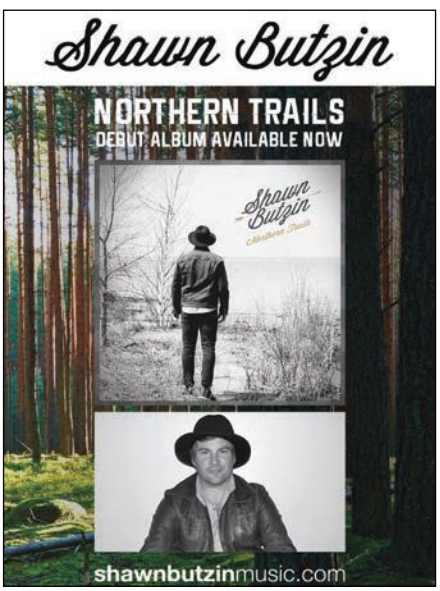

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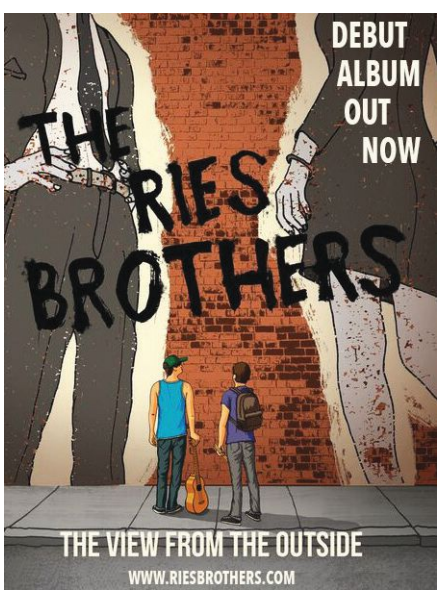
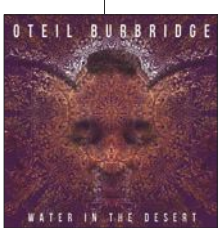


OCEAN
This is my tribute to maybe my biggest hero, Elvin Jones, who's most well-known as John Coltrane's drummer. I got to meet him twice and he was an absolute angel. When I think of Elvin, the ocean comes to mind. That's the drummer he is. This is also the last thing I ever recorded with Col. Bruce Hampton. How fitting—he loved Elvin as much as I did. Kofi and Lil' John are truly transcendent on this track, and Col. Bruce adds the lightning to the crashing waves of the ocean just perfectly. It's like Elvin with Sonny Sharrock and the Burbridge Brothers! I guess this song is about the love of nature and one's heroes.

ENOUGH FOR TWO
This started out as an experiment where I was trying to transition, harmonically, from one section to another using seemingly unrelated key centers, but linking them together by having at least one note in common. If done right, then I could write a simple melody that would connect the two sections so they wouldn't seem so disparate. From so many years of hearing jazz and classical music growing up, my ear wants to hear different harmonies than the regular ones you hear all the time in popular music. Stevie Wonder and Earth Wind & Fire are experts at this. Most people have no idea how incredibly stretched out the harmony is because the melody is so singable and simple. Lyrically, it's about encouraging someone who is paralyzed by self-doubt. "If you don't believe in yourself, then let me believe enough for the both of us—at least just for right now." Again, Alfreda brings me to tears with this one. Miguel Atwood Ferguson did a beautiful string arrangement on this song as well.



NOTHING
This song is my homage to the Atlanta funk-rock band Mother's Finest. They were a predecessor to bands like Living Colour, but with a female vocalist singing lead. Joyce Kennedy is a force of nature like Alfreda. Coincidentally, Alfreda was into Mother's Finest like Kofi, Sean and me. Their bassist, Jerry "Wyzard" Seay, is one of my earliest heroes. Fortunately, I got to meet him in Atlanta back when I was playing with Alfreda, and he was a total sweetheart as well. Instead of a guitar solo, we ran Kofi's flute through some distortion and let him rip the solo. It sounds so cool. Lyrically, this is about finding the courage to be your true self, even if you're afraid of how others might judge you. It's about self-love.

LET SOMEBODY LOVE YOU
I was going to sing this one, but David Ryan Harris put his magic voice on it. He stayed pretty true to the way I had sung it, but did it way better. I thought, "That's what I meant. It just didn't come out of my mouth like that!" This song is about someone that pushes away love because they think they don't deserve it.

BY MY SIDE
The verse in this song was influenced by Steely Dan. Walter Becker's recent passing was sad for us folks that grew up with his music. The intro, outro and chorus are definitely more prog-rock/fusion influenced, and the vamp at the end is more akin to Chaka Khan. It seems that it's a thoroughly schizophrenic song! I guess it's fitting because it's about a woman who finally comes to terms with being gay, but her religious parents can't accept it. They're having trouble merging the seemingly incongruent pictures together.

SHE IS LOVE
This song is "Oteil Gospel." It's what gospel music is like on my home planet. Mark Rivers sang this one. He's put in some serious time singing in church. It is about my mother, all mothers, Mother Earth and the sadly ignored feminine face of God—Genesis 1:26.

UNTIL YOU COME HOME
This song is my most adventurous musically, though it may not sound like it. The harmony is unusual, but the melody ties it all together. I sung this one, for better or worse. I didn't want to sing on the record, but I ended up doing it because it was the only way I could really capture the true loneliness that the song is about in the way I heard it in my head. I guess it's because I lived it.

I wrote "Until You Come Home" when my wife was living and working in Rwanda. She moved to Africa for the first year that we were married. She was in dangerous places where genocides and massacres were real. It was brutal for me. She could tell you stories that would blow your mind. I did learn to play the banjo that year, though. I needed to be a beginner at something again so I didn't go crazy. Back at home, I was finding it impossible to transform that much loneliness into solitude. Having a child will make you appreciate solitude, but Nigel wasn't in the picture yet and it was desolate. But she was chasing her dream and I'm glad she did it. It has made both of our lives so much richer.

Was there a moment where you realized your creative chemistry was still there?

SS: "So Begins the Task"—that's when we found out we could sing in such lovely unison together. It's very hard to do. It comes naturally or it doesn't, and we sound perfect together.

JC: He wrote it in '71. I recorded it and he recorded it, and now we're recording it together. It's a wonderful journey to get to that point. Around July of 1968, I went home in Los Angeles and he stayed in the studio. He recorded "So Begins the Task," "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," "Helplessly Hoping" and "Wooden Ships." It's a famous tape because it was lost for years. Somebody found it and sent it to Graham Nash, and it's been released as *Just Roll Tape*. In a way, it captured, in the moment, the songs he was writing about me and the songs that he would sing in the coming months with Crosby, Stills & Nash.

Judy, "River of Gold" is your new original on the record. What about that song lent itself to these sessions with Stephen?

JC: I've been on a big songwriting kick ever since I recorded an album with Ari Hest, *Silver Skies Blue*, which was nominated for a Grammy. I wrote "River of Gold" during my last two months of writing and I played it for Stephen just to see what he thought, and he said we've got to record this. It's the Colorado experience.

SS: She introduced me to Colorado and, except for skiing and what it did to my knees, I loved it! And coming from Florida, you get off the plane and there's air conditioning outside. [*Laughs.*] And the higher you get, the better it gets. I lived up there for a long time. It's the same treasure map mentality that we found in Florida—those guys that would have no foresight and pave over paradise and put up a parking lot. The same thing was going on in Colorado. It was just starting when I moved there. All of these wonderful little gold mining towns were getting reoccupied and dressed up, having little bed-and-breakfast destinations turned into...

JC: ...the "mall in the mountains."

In addition to these "selfies" that track your friendship, you've also included a range of covers. How did you select those songs?

JC: We spent some time writing back and forth to each other for a couple years. We'd put down lists of songs so, out of that came the core idea of what we might want to put together. I started singing Leonard Cohen's "Everybody Knows" in concert after his death last year, and I brought it to Stephen. He said, "We have got to do that." I am still completely mesmerized with his talent. I think he's a genius and his guitar playing is beyond.

SS: [About six years ago], we started this Tom Paxton song, and I was in the middle of a very busy week in New York. But I went over to her house anyway because something told me this was important to do. The chorus on this Tom Paxton song was right in my power range. And it just soared. I did it on her 12-string and sang the tune, and she laid down her part later. But we realized, "Yes, all of those tools are still there." And so it was just a matter of time before the songs appeared. Either we wrote them or the genre just fit; we didn't care either way, especially now that nobody pays for publishing rights anyway. Swine—all because [Napster's] Sean Parker got mad because the bass player stole his girlfriend. [*Laughs.*]

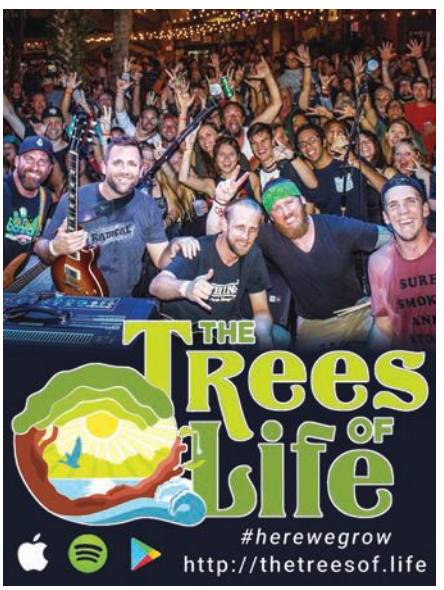
JC: We had to do "Judy Blue Eyes," of course, and when we play it now, Stephen, quite smartly, starts at the chorus leading through to the end, rather than from the first verse. So everybody winds up happy, on their feet and dancing. And we start the album and our show with the Traveling Wilburys song ["Handle With Care"].

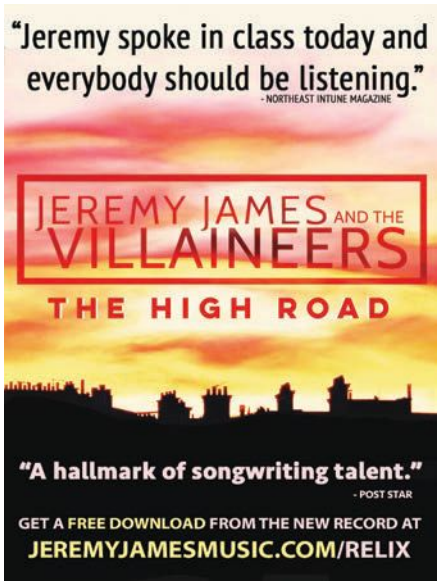
You had the unique opportunity to revisit some of your original material decades later. Did you ever consider altering your lyrics to fit in with the state of our country?

SS: Those are temptations that you have, but then you realize it hasn't really moved *that* far off. Bob Weir has this idea for "For What It's Worth," and I'm intrigued to find out about it. He wants me to schlep all the way back to New York City to go play with Dead & Company at Madison Square Garden, right after we finish! I want to be done tomorrow, as it is. I'm beat—this one will walk us all into the grave. [*Laughs.*]

JC: I'm having you sing most of that song—you need to have the last phrase on your own. I would only sing the chorus with you on "For What It's Worth."

SS: It took years to get the rock-and-roll world to figure out that the best version of these songs is not the first time you get it right in the studio. I'm not that kind of writer. I like to have it seasoned a little bit with some audience reaction to hear what the best lines are so we don't get sidetracked with books and minutiae, and then find out it's the *other* line that they sing along to. Mastery is what we all strive for. We never achieve it, but it's worth shooting for.

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year. I thought it was going to be a large gathering, but it wound up just being six or eight people, casually hanging out. We became friends from there and have been friends ever since. So when I called him up to ask if he'd like to come do this, he was like, 'Yeah man, I'm there.' It was as simple as that."

The public response was simply overwhelming. Stapleton and his group took the road for an extended tour that transformed him into an arena-level star. Although he had only one album to his name, Stapleton was buoyed by his years as a songwriting craftsman, giving the newly energized live performer a wealth of material to present.

Eventually, he decided to wind down his touring cycle to record a proper follow-up to *Traveller*. As it turned out, he delivered two. He reentered RCA Studio A with producer Dave Cobb to explore his deep well of material. "We had some time blocked off to record, but we'd been running really hard," he says. "Touring and songwriting—some people can do both in tandem, but I don't think I'm one of those guys. I need to really be still to write songs. I also had a fairly large back catalog of songs that I love very much. If they didn't get recorded, it wasn't because we didn't like them; it was just because we didn't get to them."

Some of the curation he left to Morgane. As he explained on *Charlie Rose*: "Her taste in songs is sometimes a puzzling thing to me. But I trust her, without fail, on things that she likes because she has excellent taste in just about everything but men."

While she had long been his sounding board and creative partner, with the release of *Traveller*, she also joined his band on the road. It was something they had contemplated, going all the way back to his SteelDrivers days. "A goal of ours was always to get to a place where we could be touring together and have the family out. Right now, we have my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and both of my children. [In an October 30 Instagram post, Morgane also announced she was pregnant with twins.] My mother comes out when she feels like it. We have a family bus, and the kids are homeschooled, so we very much get to be a family on the road. Beyond all the other professional dreams, that's a dream come true to get to do that."

As for the challenges of taking the stage with one's life partner, an endeavor that the two share with Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi, he notes, "We're a pretty good team and get along fairly well and understand—much like I'm sure Derek and Susan do—that we have a job to do when we go out there. Obviously, anyone can have a bad day, and you bring that energy to the show or to a room when you walk in. Those times are unavoidable, and that's just life. But I will say this: Anybody who's been in a band for any amount of time will say that just being in a band is being married to a group of people. It has to be intimate for it to work. Everybody knows everybody's personal stuff, and we're all pulling for each other. So the fact that my wife and I are married is not very different. It's great for us on a personal level, but the band part of it is just like being in a band."

When Stapleton returned to the studio, he brought his band with him once again, in an effort to capture the energy and connection of his live performances in "a historic room where you get to feel the ghosts in the walls, informing and elevating what do you."

Stapleton views both volumes of *From A Room* as a collective body of work, selected and performed with a similar intent. "I recorded some of these songs because of the people I wrote them with. A lot of songwriters on these records weren't on the *Traveller* record. I felt it was important to show that part of my songwriting, particularly with Mike Henderson," he says.

That's certainly true of "Midnight Train to Memphis," his collaboration with Henderson that first saw the light of day with The SteelDrivers.

"That's a song I've always played," Stapleton explains. "The way it is now is more in line with the spirit of how it was written. We adapted it to the banjo and it made its way into The SteelDrivers' catalog because it was kind of a prison song, which matched the demeanor of what the band was. But it was a rock song adapted to bluegrass, and now we play it with loud electric guitars and a blues backbeat. I carried that song with me to The Jompson Brothers, and with my solo stuff. It's a song I've always played live, but we're doing it this way now, so we thought to document it.

"I always looked at songwriting, touring and playing live music as one whole thing, not separate entities; one always feeds off the other. These songs very well could've been recorded on *Traveller*, or any other project I've done previously—they're songs that I love and my wife loves, and they're always part of the equation. I read a Billy Gibbons interview one time, and he said he tried to record things he would want to listen to. That's something I keep in my heart when I'm trying to record music. That's very much the attitude of these records."

SweetWater's Nick Nock's echoed Kyle's sentiments as he looked back on his early days at the brewery, which began over 20 years ago, when he became employee number one.

"I was a homebrewer and then, in '96, I had a New Year's resolution: I wanted to get paid for making beer. I stuck to that resolution and, ultimately, I was working at five different brewpubs around the city before I ran into the sales guy at SweetWater and asked him if he needed help. He said no, but encouraged me to check the place out, which I did, and I really liked the guys. It was awesome.

"When I came in, there were three guys running the show, and I actually volunteered for a really long time. It was my job to load the truck of kegs. This guy would show up with an old dairy truck with maybe a 10-foot bed. He'd give me a little memo book and say, 'I need two 420s, one ESB and two Blues.' Then I would have to go to the cooler and do some crazy stuff—climbing, getting the kegs down, putting them on a palette and giving it to him. That was 20 years ago. Now we have twenty 18-wheelers going out the door. It's really cool to see that where we once were doing five kegs, now we're doing hundreds of kegs.

"Back then, though, when we showed up to work we'd all listen to the same jammy music. We enjoyed what we did. I don't want to say it was a hobby we'd get paid for, but we weren't always wearing shirts and, at times, it could be a free for all. Still, we'd get the job done and it's grown into a big ol' business. We're number 15 in the country [of craft brewers, based on sales volume]. We're still doing what we did before; it's just gotten bigger and better."

As for the process of creating our beer itself, which continued through multiple hop additions after our sweet wort reached boil in the brew kettle—some of which you can see for yourself through the accompanying images, and look for more at relix.com, sweetwaterbrew.com and kylehollingsworth.com, as well as our social sites—I asked Nick to describe it in layperson's terms:

"By the time you and Kyle had arrived, I pre-milled the malt we had agreed on, so it would be ready for us to get the mash going. Then we put in some base water and we added the malt as the rakes were stirring to make the mash, which has an oatmeal consistency. We agreed on the 149-degree mash set temperature, which is good because that would give us a lot of fermantables, but also leave some behind for a nice mouth feel. From there, we transferred to the kettle, *sparging* a little bit, which means adding more water to the mash and showering the grain to pick up any residual sugars.

"We did a five-barrel batch and we boiled it for an hour to sanitize the wort; during that process, we added the hops. We added a handful of hops up front, which is going to give us some bitterness. Then we went crazy on the back end, which is going to give us flavor and aroma, which I know we're going to enjoy. Then we pitched the fermenter [adding yeast].

"Once it came out of the kettle, we had to cool it down because if you add boiling wort, it's going to kill the yeast—the yeast is a living organism. So we went through a heat exchanger, and we knocked out into the fermenter at about 68 degrees. That's where the yeast likes to thrive and, hopefully, by 6 a.m. tomorrow, we're going to see some activity of fermentation—bubbles coming out of the blow off bucket, which would be a great sign.

"The next step is: We're going to take samples of it daily to see what the gravity is, see how the yeast is reacting with the sugar water that we created. Then, at a certain time, we're going to dry hop a lot, to add to the aroma of the beer—that should happen on day number three, day number four. Then, around day number seven, with the samples that we've been taking, we're going to notice that the yeast has done its job; it's not going to eat any more sugars. Once that's the case, we're going to chill it down from 66–68 degrees to 32–33 degrees—that's going to make the yeast become dormant and drop out. From there, we'll move it to another tank to let it condition for about a week, and then we're going to move it to the brite tank, where we're going to carbonate it. Then once it's carbonated, it's on..."

Kyle in the SweetWater lab

Kyle samples in the Woodlands after Nick Burgoyne removes a nail

* * *

WHAT STYLE OF BEER ARE WE MAKING? I'M tempted to call it a New England-style IPA [I am a native New Englander after all—*Go Sawx*], as that is the beer that you'll most commonly find in my fridge these days. However, as per the authority of Nick and Kyle, I'll stand down on that reference. What I can promise, however, is that if you enjoy a New England-style IPA, then you'll be a fan of our beer. I'll leave the proper description to Nick, who says, "It's going to be a very drinkable, big, bold, hazy 7.2–7.3 percent [ABV] IPA. I think it'll be a crowd-pleaser. We hooked up with our friends at Crosby and they pointed us to some dynamo hops that I think are going to be absolutely delicious and aromatic."

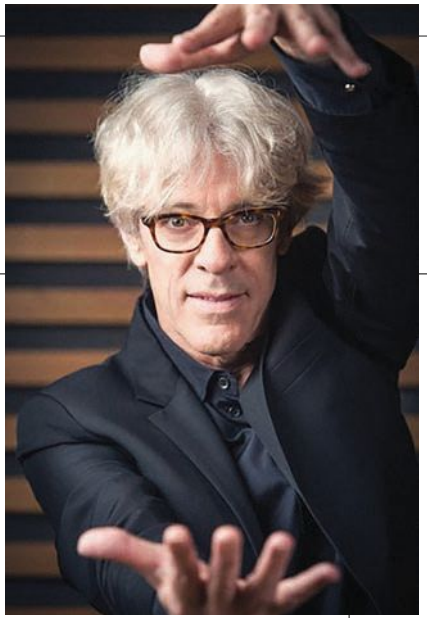
By the time you read this, we will have sampled the pilot batch—here's hoping that I will have received a package in time to share with my Thanksgiving guests—and made some adjustments in preparation for our climactic return to SweetWater to brew the production batch. Are you curious what we're going call it? So am I. As I write this, we still have no name, but we're launching an online contest and I'll share the final results in my next report.

This project traces back to February 2014 when I first approached Kyle during a String Cheese rehearsal at the Hard Rock Resort in Riviera Maya to discuss the possibility of working together on a beer, so I'll leave him with the final word:

"It's been over three years in the making from Mexico to Atlanta. It's been a long journey but, with SweetWater, I think we found the perfect match. Everything has been really cool, starting with the hop experience—going out to the fields and seeing that process from the harvest through the drying kiln—then coming here and continuing that whole arc of the story from our first discussions over the phone to the hop farm to the brewing and then the tasting in a few weeks. I just feel really lucky and blessed that I'm able to play music and follow this other passion of brewing. Music is very exploratory, and now we're going on another sort of a safari together. I can't wait to see, and taste, what happens."

STEWART COPELAND

By DEAN BUDNICK



"WE'RE NOT A supergroup; we're a supper group," Stewart Copeland says with a laugh of his new quartet Gizmodrome, which also features guitarist Adrian Belew (King Crimson, Talking Heads), bassist Mark King (Level 42) and keyboardist Vittorio Cosma (PFM and Elio e le Storie Tese). Gizmodrome came together when the Italian government enticed The Police and Oysterhead drummer to visit for dinner and a performance. Cosma and some additional local players joined Copeland for that initial trip over a decade ago and the low-key gigs eventually morphed into Gizmodrome's self-titled debut and upcoming shows far outside the Italian borders.

You've played in Italy over the years with other guitarists. How did Adrian come to join you and Vittorio?

We met years ago. He can probably remember the date because he's a guitarist and he's like that. Stanley Clarke, Adrian and I were all called by a film festival in San Francisco because we were all involved with film in one way or another. So we did a little trio thing.

In all of the intervening years, we intended to get something together, but life is complicated. In fact, we'd been courting Adrian to join us in our summer adventures. And the pitch was: "Look, the little town in Italy gives us a villa to stay in for a couple of weeks. There's a beautiful little bijou opera house to rehearse in."

We've done this in a few towns, in Longiano, on the island of Elba and so on. They set us up with this idyllic circumstance in return for a concert on the village green. By the time we play the concert on the village green, the whole town knows the songs because we've been banging away at them all week in the little opera house. So it's always a blast. And with Adrian on board, I said, 'Fuck it; let's call Mark." And so we did. Mark was in within 20 minutes of me texting him.

Did you just play one gig with Stanley and Adrian?

Yes, although Stanley and I did get together later and form Animal Logic. We go way back. One year, he even got me—my friends can't believe this—to play jazz festivals in Europe. You see, I've got a rap that I use at any dinner party: "You know, the problem with jazz musicians is that they all suck." [*Laughs*.] Any social gathering can be vastly improved with a comment like that. It doesn't have to be true. Who cares? It gets the blood flowing.

Now, Stanley and I are best buddies, and he is a god of music, regardless of genre. His set, by the way, is six songs, which brings me to another point about jazz—however much I love to sneer at the 90 percent of jazz musicians who are bullshit, I love the jazz audience. That is one of the most beautiful audiences on the planet to play to. They don't need you to sing a pop song that's really easy to comprehend. They want to hear everything you have to play—all of it. Just turn on the faucet. And that suits me fine.

Do you see any analogies between the jazz audiences and the audiences you were playing to with Oysterhead?

Yes, they were very similar. And with Les [Claypool] and Trey [Anastasio], I discovered that setlists are for wimps and material is for wimps. [*Laughs*.] With the jamband experience, the audience wants to have never heard it before, and for no one to have ever played it before. With The Police, the audience knows when the big chorus is coming up and then it hits them right between the eyes just like they were expecting it. It's catharsis right there.

There were times when we were playing Bonnaroo [with Oysterhead], where although we *had* been blazing, now we're not blazing. I'm looking around and we're dead in the water: *Anybody got anything? I'm feeling a little wimpy*. But then I can see, from the looks on the people in the first few rows, this is what they came for. This is all straight from the hip. And if it's straight from the hip, there's going to be dull spots. And then there's that surge—all of a sudden, Trey's got it, Les picks up and bang, we're raging again! And the lift from the audience when they discern that—it comes in and it lands on something—is just like the buzz when we hit that big pop chorus. It's the same release, everybody goes hog wild and that's damn exciting.

Speaking of Bonnaroo, what are your memories of The Police's set in 2007?

We all dropped acid—OK, I wanted us to drop acid. Sting is usually game for that kind of thing, but we didn't. So I wanted to start a rumor that we had. And it never caught hold, so fuck it; we didn't drop acid. We should've; we intended to. Now with Oysterhead... I'll just say that Oysterhead had a great show at Bonnaroo.

I also think The Police did a really good show. Since Bonnaroo was not a Police gig I wanted to eat all of those other bands, burn them all down and show them who's boss. I really enjoyed the Bonnaroo show because of that urgency. I got a particular thrill hearing that buzz from the audience and knowing that we had to earn it, rather than it being there all along.

I wanted The Police to do something different for Bonnaroo, but I don't think my colleagues really understood that Bonnaroo has a different kind of ethos. Besides, The Police doesn't belong to us anymore. It's not for us to screw around with. The Police is a litany. The Police is a liturgy, even. It's a sacred service. It's not about: "Oh, so now we're going to do some tracks from our new album." "Fuck that. I don't want to hear your new album. I want to hear 'Roxanne.'" That's the way I felt when I saw Paul McCartney. He might as well have just said, "OK, time for you to go buy a new T-shirt because I'm going to play a song from my new album."

For newness, for experimentation, for musical exploration, that's Les and Trey. That's what Mark and Adrian and Vittorio are all about. It's what me writing music for big-ass orchestras is all about. The Police experience is almost unrelated to that. It's about playing those songs that have such emotional baggage. I can't wait to get out there with Gizmodrome because it'll be new and exciting and fun and weird.

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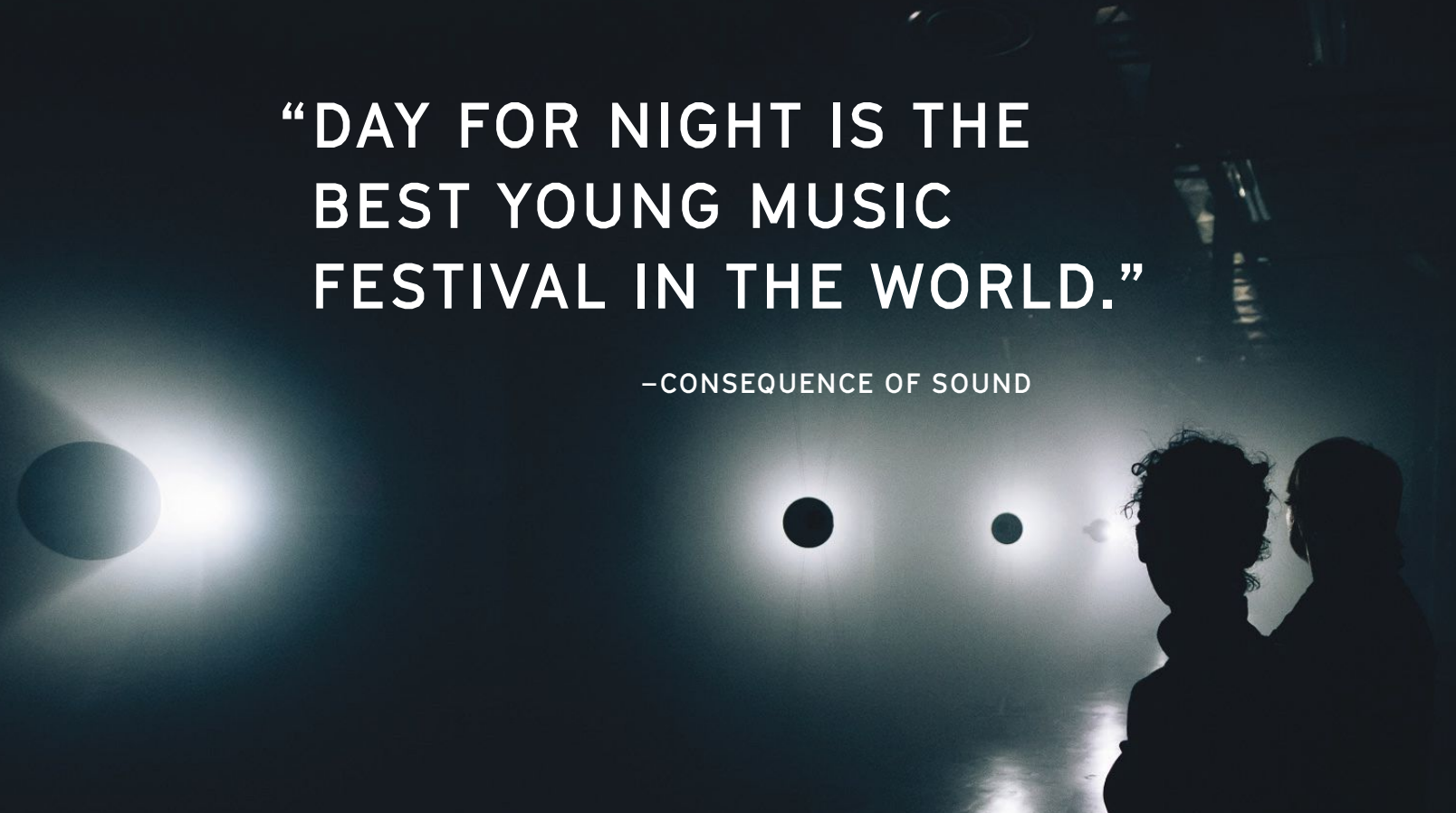

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